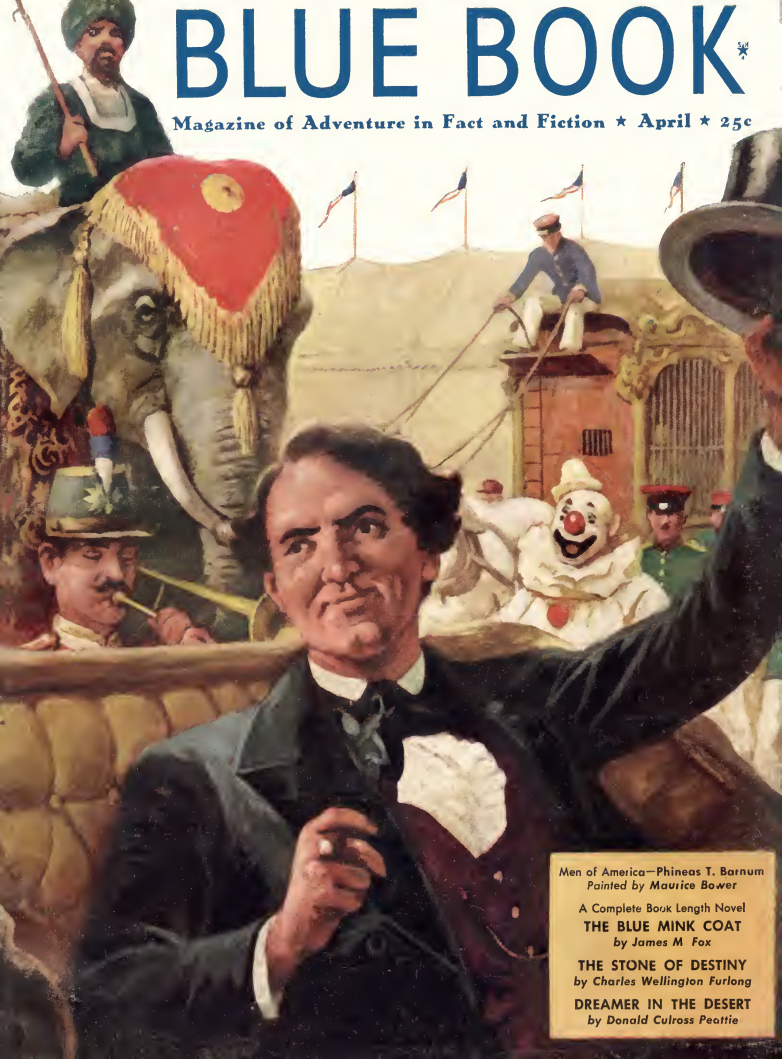


BLUE BOOK

Magazine of Adventure in Fact and Fiction ★ April ★ 25c



Men of America—Phineas T. Barnum
Painted by Maurice Bower

A Complete Book Length Novel

THE BLUE MINK COAT

by James M. Fox

THE STONE OF DESTINY

by Charles Wellington Furlong

DREAMER IN THE DESERT

by Donald Culross Peattie



MEN OF AMERICA

Phineas Taylor Barnum

ONE of the first and probably the greatest of American showmen, Phineas Taylor Barnum taught his fellow-countrymen to play, and won fame for himself throughout his fantastic progress. The dwarf Tom Thumb, the giant elephant Jumbo and all manner of other freaks were his stock-in-trade; and he candidly explained his theory of show business in a lecture, "The Science of Money Making and the Philosophy of Humbug."

His first venture in publicity, elaborated from his own book, "Life of Phineas T. Barnum, Written by Himself," is described in the story "The Widow's Son," which begins on page 56 of this issue. But it was some years later, in 1835, that he entered the show business in earnest by taking over and exhibiting the aged Negro Joice Heth—advertised as 161

years old and the former nurse of George Washington; there was even shown a phony bill-of-sale from Augustine Washington, the father of George, dated 1727!

After Joice's death the hoax was exposed, but Barnum seems not to have been seriously blamed. The American Museum, which Barnum opened in New York in 1842, became a beloved place of entertainment, exhibiting a curious medley of genuine curios and phonics like the Feejee Mermaid and the Bearded Lady, which have become traditional in our carnivals. The Museum's greatest attraction was the dwarf Tom Thumb; and the show soon became so successful that Barnum took it to England and exhibited before the Royal Family.

From Europe, Barnum brought back the celebrated singer Jenny Lind; and for a time thereafter he retired

from the show business—even became a member of the Connecticut Legislature and ran, unsuccessfully, for Congress.

In 1871, however, Barnum brought out "The Greatest Show on Earth," the first three-ringed circus, which for twenty years thereafter was a national institution. Pictures showing Jumbo feeding from a third-story window were typical of its advertising; and the press agent apologized for the absence of a giraffe from the menagerie, by explaining that it had been necessary to feed it to the lions during the voyage from Africa.

In 1889 Barnum took this show to England also, and was himself one of its greatest attractions. The Prince of Wales, indeed, was quoted as saying that he intended to keep on attending the performance until "they sing God Save Grandmother!"

Readers' Comment*

We Keep Them Chained

PERHAPS one letter every ten years isn't too many to bother you with, so here's mine for this decade. Back in 1941, I wrote to add my arguments to a debate then going on complete versus continued stories, and you must listen to the readers because you're still putting out my favorite magazine.

No, I'm not on the subscription list, and I shall never be, because I like to exercise one of the few personal rights left to us today; the right to select my own reading material, on the basis of its contents. Up to now, you have batted 1,000.

Now, I note that some of my fellow-readers are arguing about the possibility of having the top BLUE BOOK stories brought out in anthology form. In the first place, how would you pick the "top" stories? Either you pay your writers a very high scale, or you keep them chained in the back room, because it is very seldom indeed that any of your stories miss being tops. So, let's forget the anthology, and just continue putting out a good magazine.

Of course, I could be a little smug about the whole thing, because my shelves are loaded with eleven years of BLUE BOOK, carefully filed by date. All that is missing is the few issues I missed saving during the war years. With a little planned rotation, I find those back issues fill in a lot of wonderful hours, while I wait for the new issue to hit the stands.

DON HARVEY

As Many Women as Men?

AFTER a hard day of cleaning, baking, and tending children, it is no relaxation to me, to read the ladies' magazines with their page after page of recipes, and articles on "How To Be a Perfect Wife," or "Baby Care." It is then that I enjoy my husband's birthday gift to me—my BLUE BOOK Magazine. It takes me into worlds that venture far beyond the confines of the walls of house-keeping, and I can really relax. I am willing to wager that BLUE BOOK has as many women readers as it has men readers.

—MRS. DON LARY

*The Editors of BLUE BOOK are glad to receive letters of constructive criticism and suggestions; and for the ones we publish each month we will pay the writers ten dollars each.

Letters should not be longer than two hundred words; no letters can be returned and all will become property of McCall Corporation. They should be addressed: Editor of Letters, Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Ave., New York 17, New York.

BLUE BOOK

April, 1951

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The short stories and novel herein are fiction and intended as such. They do not refer to real characters or actual events. If the name of any living person is used, it is a coincidence.

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PHILLIPS WYMAN, Publisher

DONALD KENNICOTT, Editor

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Dreamer in the

A NOT-SOON-FORGOTTEN STORY FROM THE HISTORY OF ARIZONA

ARIZONA, Indian-faced, somnolent and desolate along the border, waits timelessly for the strangers who come to her. A tingle like danger is in her high airs; sunstroke like a tomahawk hides in the brilliance that clothes her. Only yesterday her rocks were ambush and her sands held sign. Today she is tourist country; west and north, south and east, runs the crooked lattice of good roads. Motoring there is next to flight. South of Tucson you seem to be racing in the sun's own orbit, across a desert infinite as space itself. On many a stretch you will be driving eighty before you know it, ninety if you don't look out. You slow down to sixty, and it seems like a crawl, so great the distance to the nearest ranges, so far the fainter, higher mountains looming beyond.

Slow to forty-five an hour. Forty-five miles—the best that the American Army, when first it broke these trails, could do by forced march in a long

day. Slow down to five—that's cavalry on the trot, riding out from Fort Chiricahua, perhaps, the guidon snapping in the shining wind. Slow to three, till your complaining engine knocks and you shift gear. That's the wagon train, no faster than infantry itself, the canvas-sided Army ambulances, each with a six-mule hitch, bringing the officers' wives out to the post, with their gear and their fear, their courage and their children. . . .

An Army post on the Arizona frontier in the seventies was a dot sweltering in furnace heat, a lonely fist raised against the stony red face of wilderness. Fort Defiance, Fort Apache, Fort Whipple or Crittenden or Chiricahua—they stood, hundreds of miles apart, islanded in a barbarous waste. Seek any one of them out today, up Arizona's washboard side roads that glare in relentless noon, and you will find no more than old adobe walls crumbling in the sun like a child's sand castle. But what ghosts

inhabit them! Of a lanky, discontented doctor by the name of Reed, Walter Reed. Of a gallantly mustachioed young officer named Leonard Wood. Of old General Crook himself—"Gray Wolf Chief," the Apaches called him, Nantan Lupan. Or of a certain second lieutenant who proved so foxy in maneuvers that he got himself something of a name; you will have heard it—John J. Pershing.

For our Army then was in the flower of its career tradition, facing, on American soil, an enemy entrenched in a last foothold and fighting for its tribal life. The Army post was a citadel of decency, connected with the world only by a copper strand of telegraph line strung from mesquite stump to yucca stalk, a thread that the red man soon learned to snip with a blow of his tomahawk; he'd patch it then, for concealment of the cut, with a twist of rawhide that still left the instrument dead. But not even the Apaches could cut the tie that binds an Army



Illustrated by
BENTON CLARK

Desert

by DONALD CULROSS PEATTIE

wife to her husband. So the women came on slow rolling wheels to the forts, women who knew, like Elizabeth Custer, that if the hostiles ever got too near them, they themselves would be shot by their own menfolk; they well knew why. Or like Olive Yule, returning from lush and tranquil Maryland to her husband, commanding officer at Fort Chiricahua, with their newborn baby in her arms. Under the sweltering canvas she came riding, drawn by six mules straining over the rocky trace—a serene madonna of the desert innocent of the dæmonic danger brooding there.

Major Yule, taciturn as he was tender, let no word of it spoil his ardent welcome to wife and son. But she could read, like Apache sign, the furrows between his brows. She forebore question, till after a call next day from an impetuous young lieutenant, who let it slip that Apaches were simply leaking off the reservation. And it was the Major's duty, of course, to

have every Indian in his area of command present and accounted for. Olive, when Lieutenant Mosby had taken himself off, quietly picked up her needlework and remarked to her husband, "Now tell me all about the trouble, dear; I'd much rather know it."

So at last she heard about the Dreamer. Major Yule, drawing calmly upon his cigar, was dispassionate and just. "The Dreamer's real name," he explained, "so my Pache scouts tell me, is Tzidiku. No white man has seen him since he was a lad. But they say he had more promise than any on the reservation. Had intelligence, farmed industriously. Was drawn toward Christianity. Until the massacre."

It was a word to make Olive look up. "A massacre by whites," the Major said grimly, knocking his ash off. "It's not a pretty tale, Olive, but it's where the story begins." So he

told it—how, while the post troops were out against hostiles, and the reservation braves were away hunting, there had come at the gallop a mixed gang of Tucson ruffians, gamblers and drunkards, Pima Indians with old scores to settle, and Mexicans burning to revenge former defeats. Tzidiku returned to find his defenseless people hacked into pieces. The young squaws, dead with their shamed heads wrapped in their shawls, had been ravished. The children were vanished, to be sold in Mexico as slaves. Among the dishonored old were his parents, whom he buried. Then he disappeared. That was years ago, but now, like a waver of warning smoke on the horizon, like a far-away dust devil, he had reappeared.

"He's holding dances up in his stronghold," the Major told her slowly. "You'd think the drums could be heard on the reservation. In their pulses, maybe. So they are slipping back to him nightly. He tells them the land is theirs, and the result's like a fever rising."

"The stronghold—where is it?"

"A steep-walled cañon not twenty miles from here. Oaks, and plenty of piñon pine to feed them, and sheer sides. It's all but impregnable, the scouts tell me."

"What are you to do, then, dear?"

"Well, I'm 'damned if I do and damned if I don't," he said, smiling briefly. "I've written my report. It'll go up through channels, and into limbo, I suppose. Meanwhile, happy as I am to have you, my dear, I'm half sorry you're back."

But danger seemed a cowed thing to Olive, when next day she walked across the dusty compound to see the reservation Indians come in, as they





did twice a week, to be counted and to receive their rations of beef and sugar and beans. It was always, to her, both proud and pitiful to see these fierce people so submissive to Army law. She stood, out of the brazen sunlight, watching them shuffle toward their dole. The men still wore the blood-red headband that had struck terror to Pima and Papago and, long ago, to the *conquistadores*; it made their brows look broad and stern. In the long heads and high cheekbones of men and women both was race—pure, proud blood—and Olive understood how those enlisted men who offered trinkets to cajole the younger squaws failed so completely of any conquest. One face above all suddenly arrested her—that of a handsome red girl with a wizened baby on her back—a face with a wild and prisoned insubordination in it. It shocked Olive, giving her a shiver of fear, to see it. Just then her caller of yesterday strolled up, and saw the look on her own face.

"We captured her on a scout just yesterday, Mrs. Yule," Lieutenant Mosby eagerly informed her. "Luck, wasn't it? She was with a party of renegades from the reservation—running like jack-rabbits ahead of our horses—but she wasn't one of ours. Do you know who she is?" He brought it out like a trumping ace.

Olive always allowed young men their little triumphs. "Who, Mr. Mosby?" she asked, watching the glittering eyes of the squaw that roved the compound.

"Mrs. Yule, she's the wife of the Dreamer—Tzidiku! The young one; he has two. The old one, they say, is a witch if ever there was one. This girl he put away from him—part of his crazy religion, I guess—and she left his hidey-hole and got in with the lot from the reservation. Kind of a looker, isn't she?"

As the story of the Dreamer's runaway squaw got around the post, the opinion grew that Tzidiku was out of his mind indeed. To the woman-starved men, it was inconceivable that a sane man, red or white, would turn out a pretty young wife. It was the post surgeon, Dr. Freneau, who seemed to understand.

"Buddha, you remember," he discoursed, as he stirred his coffee at Olive's table after dinner, "left his wife and little son when he got his religious call. St. Bernard, for the same reason, jumped out of the window to dodge marriage."

"And Abraham sent Hagar away," added Olive, slowly, "into the desert, with her child."

"It's my guess," Freneau bluntly said, "that Tzidiku's taken some of his fanatic notions right out of Christian teaching, and warped and blackened them. He's left out all the compassion, seized on the miraculous, and worked up the ardor into frenzy."

"Good Lord!" said Yule, in reverent horror. But he nodded slowly. "He's telling his followers that he's a savior and superhuman—immune to the white man's bullets."

THE post sweltered in rising heat and growing tension. No breath of air stirred through the Yules' quarters; outside, the cottonwoods talked thirstily of rain that did not come. Sentries were redoubled; no longer did the young men come to chat in Olive's parlor. Even the telegraph these days had nothing to say; instead of its chatter there sounded on tent canvas and porch roof, the *tic-tac* of heavy-bodied centipedes on the march. You smelled trouble in the air, and it came when one of the rash Irish soldiers "made up," as he called it, to Tzidiku's squaw and got a knife wound in the leg for answer. She ran for it when he yelled for the guard, and desert night swallowed her.

"But this time," Dr. Freneau told Olive, as next day he stepped into her adobe shade, "Hagar's left her child behind. It's a sickly infant, and as bad luck would have it there are only two nursing squaws on the reservation.



In the long heads and high cheekbones of men and women was race—pure, proud blood.

One has consumption, and the other worse. Might as well let it die now, I suppose. One more Apache the less, and all that. But I'm a doctor."

"And I'm a mother," said Olive. At the note in her voice the tired physician looked into her face keenly. For a long moment these two aliens to warfare—two to whom life was sacred—gazed at one another. "Bring the baby here, Doctor," Olive then said quietly. "Let me see what I can do."

When the booted and bearded Major strode into his wife's parlor and saw her suckling the Apache baby, Olive held up her hand before he could speak. "This isn't anything that Army regulations can cover, Burton. This is between one woman and another. Don't say a word to me about it, if you can't forgive it in me."

He stood still, speechless; only his contented infant son murmured like a dove from the cradle in the corner. The Major stepped softly over to his wife and kissed her bent head. "The milk of human kindness," he acknowledged gently.

Once in a while he could manage to understand women, but never the War Department. For the sleeping telegraph line, strung from mesquite post to palo verde, sputtered awake. The Major's report had not, after all, drowned in Lethe channels. General Sherman smelled powder again in it: the order to march was his second nature. In silent desperation Burt Yule handed this serene wife of his the telegram he had just got.

BRING THE DREAMER ONTO THE
RESERVATION ALIVE OR DEAD.

Olive looked up. "They can't see what it means!" she said, aghast. "You called the place impregnable!"

"It's an order," he answered grimly. "If I could get to him to parley! But I can't trust the scouts any more, and to ride up to the stronghold without a safe-conduct would be suicide for the troops. It's just what Tzidiku's waiting for. Something he can call an attack."



But Officers' Call was sounded. The day was blistering; the sun was riding high, a fiery charger, and the brassy notes blared out over the white dust of the compound in the very color of

war. Out of their quarters the officers came striding, the group converging at the dark adobe doorway to headquarters. And it was in the very hour of that anxious conference that the red Hagar returned.

A small happening—one renegade the more accounted for, and only a

*"He tells them the land
is theirs, and the result
is like a fever rising."*



woman at that. But Major Yule saw a gleam. "Why did she come back?" he demanded of the Apache translator.

"She want her baby. She say, her breast cry for it!"

The Major smiled. He took a deep breath of determination, and turned sharply to his aide. "Send Dr. Frenau to me. At once. Send for the woman also. And ask Mrs. Yule to have the goodness to step across, bringing with her the Apache baby."

A strange war council, that! The captive red woman's sullen face flared once darkly at sight of her child in Olive's arms. The baby, plumped out now and placid, gurgled contentedly as the tense group talked. It was the Doctor who held command of the situation, surrendered to him, after a brief direction, by the Major. The Doctor it was, with the translator's help, who made Hagar understand that her child would have died without the mercy of the white woman's breast. Again in her dark face the fire flared. It was not anger now, but maternity as fierce as a cougar's. The

Doctor talked on, and the red woman slowly nodded. As far as one could count on gratitude in an Apache, they had waked it. Yes, the woman agreed; yes, the scout translated, she would lead them to the stronghold. She would go ahead of them, and treat with Tzidiku for a parley. And as Olive laid the baby girl back in its mother's arms, the two women sealed the pact in a steady look.

A long shot, but better than nothing. Again, at dawn, the bugle sounded. Following the guidon, the troop rode away, out of the compound, out of this slight foothold of safety dug—with such blood and sweat—into the wide prevailing savagery of that Arizona. The hoofbeats thundered softly away into distance; the last flutter of the colors was lost to Olive's sight in empty brilliance.

The Major, in action again, felt his years drop away, felt young as the lieutenant he had been when he was out after the feathered Sioux on the plains of Wyoming. Duty and danger were again in bright ascendency—the twin stars of a soldier's destiny. The rattlers rose and buzzed and then, at the earth-shaking threat of the hoofs, uncoiled and slid away. Out of the gullies and *palmilla* clumps and tufts of sacaton grass, his dark scouts rose, silently pointing the way. And out of the tawny carpet of saca-

ton and gramma rose the heads of the Mustang Mountains, where Tzidiku waited in his stronghold. The poised hawks, who could see with their telescopic eyes red man and white, waited on, impartial spectators; higher still, the fateful buzzards soared, watching for the outcome.

As at the high sheer gateway to the stronghold, the troop, too, waited, their horses fretting softly, the Major could not even know that Hagar the squaw would ever return to him from that wasps' nest. He could not know that instead the whole swarm of them would not in the next moment be about his ears. Or by what plot, more cunningly concealed, Tzidiku was even now preparing to sting.

But woman strength, apparently, prevailed. Yule could not fathom what the Dreamer had in his fume-filled brain when he let the troops ride into the stronghold, their hoofbeats reverberating from the narrow

walls. From every side cañon, from behind rocks and pines, Apaches stepped forth. They were stripped to short drawers, moccasins, and cartridge belts, and painted in red or black with a white line running from cheek bone across the nose to cheek bone—the mark of the warrior dedicated to death or victory. The noon sunlight ran a testing finger along the weathered metal of the guns they cradled.

The Dreamer alone was not painted for battle. Flanked by his wrinkled, bitter-eyed old wife and his impassive young one, he received the Major lying upon a litter. He was, or he acted the part of, a sick man. Very light-skinned for an Apache, he looked like a man in shock, as if he were still gazing upon that long-ago massacre. Only the lips were firm—pressed-together in such fanatic resolve that they stood out like a knife edge. When he answered through Yule's Apache

scout, his voice chanted like a psalmist's. An echo of this tinged the interpreter's.

"He say, not now. He say he come presently. He got things to do. You send the soldiers away, and he come after. When he dream to come."

"Tell him he is to come now!" said the Major sharply. "Tell him I have my orders, and I will execute them. No one will hurt him, or any Indian, if he comes without resistance. But if anyone here makes a move against us, Tzidiku will be the first to die."

Back into Apache crow-talk went this command, and the threat with it. Before, around him, and behind, the Major heard a rattlesnake buzzing. Nobody said anything; it was just a murmur, a stiffening, a coiling. The Dreamer's hypnotic voice floated above it, in answer. In the scout's English, the answer was: "I cannot rise. You must take me up in your hands."

"Sergeant," said the Major briskly, "take the foot of his litter. Corporal Donahue, take the head."

As the litter rose off the ground, Mosby—who had his orders—put his hand to his Colt. But his eyes were on the couched fanatic; he did not see the old wife snatch a derringer out of her rags and level it at the Major. Hagar it was who furiously knocked awry the old woman's fire, so that the bullet spat in empty anger on the rock wall behind Yule. While the shot still echoed, Mosby coolly put a bullet of his own through Tzidiku's head. . . .

"So Hagar paid her debt to you, my dear," the Major that night told Olive, ending his story; he unbuckled his belt and tossed it down with a sigh of good fatigue. "It was pretty scaly there for a while, but when they got to see Tzidiku's blood, the whole bad dream blew up. They saw how he'd sold them, and though we had to fight our way out, the hear. had gone out of them. Mosby says they've been pouring back into the reservation all this evening, turning in their guns, every man of them. God bless your kindness, Olive! Because of it, the Territory's safe tonight."

TODAY it's safe as daylight, of course; no roads so level and so long—they run to horizon. Where the troop rode out, spurs jingling, guidon snapping, to beard the Dreamer, you can fly on speeding tires over the mesa, under the same sky. Arizona sky, deep with a blue, clear wisdom—heaven's own, though Olive Yule had her share of it. We are all of us, after all, fed by the breast of mother earth; it is not in Nature that men should forever war with one another. At least it is not in our American dream, which we dream by daylight, and without drumbeat. That may yet prevail.



Where the troop rode out, spurs jingling, you can fly on speeding tires.



Had Karen stood here in front of the mound of earth, facing the gray-green German uniforms, the leveled rifles?

Norway Rendezvous

AN O.S.S. MAN RETURNS TO THE SCENE OF HIS GREAT ADVENTURE IN THE HOPE OF FINDING THE ONE WHO SHARED ITS HIGH HAZARDS.

by JOHN CLAGETT

PURPLE and yellow crocus bloomed in the grass of the embankment. A tree grew at its foot. A tug hooted from the harbor below; birds were singing in the trees in the courtyard beyond. I stood looking moodily at the embankment, at the brown-gray, ancient walls of the Akershus Fortress beyond, and especially at the objects standing before the embankment.

There were two marble crosses set about ten feet apart and a short distance before the earthen wall. They were the height of a tall man, and the arms of the crosses were short. On a

simple block of marble before them was carved in Norwegian a brief verse.

*They fight, they fall.
They gave us all.*

The elm tree back of one of the crosses was heavily marked with old bullet-holes; grass covered other marks in the embankment.

For these two crosses marked the sites of the execution stakes against which hundreds of members of the Norwegian Underground had stood, tied, for their last instant upon earth.

My hands shook as I lighted a cigarette. Had Karen stood with her

back to the rough wood of a stake, here in front of the mound of earth, and for her last sight on earth, seen the gray-green German uniforms, the flinty faces, the leveled rifles?

I didn't know.

BUT I was beginning to be afraid. You see, I didn't even know her real name, and yet I loved her. I had been in Norway for a week now, and every afternoon from one until five, as I'd promised in my advertisements in all the papers, I'd sat on the bench in the open courtyard of the house on Bygdø Alle. I'd felt eager at first, sad but



I died numberless deaths in my whirling fall.

eager; then as the days crawled by the sadness grew more and more. It began to seem to me that people stared covertly at me as they walked past; perhaps they did—the advertisements must have aroused a good deal of curiosity.

When the cigarette burned short, I pinched it out, hesitated, then put the end in my pocket. This was a shrine; outdoors and under the sky, unguarded and free as a Norwegian shrine should be. I went down to the street and a taxi.

The chestnut trees on Bygdø Alle were alight with their candles of creamy bloom, and the spring-rain-scent of lilacs drifted in the wind as I sat down on the bench in the open court yard. In the first days I'd looked at every passerby, hoping to see the grace of Karen's walk and the gold of her hair, but I saw only strangers. This time I just sat there. The afternoon passed slowly; I was lost in memories of our forty-eight hours together.

The thought of those two crosses, the bullet scars in the elm tree and the mental vision of Karen, tied erect to a stake, eyes on the distant hills, was haunting me. I needed something to lay the ghost. Naturally and easily the present fell away, and the past came back—and it seemed I was trudging through pine woods with Karen.

My mother and father were Norwegian immigrants to the United States. I was born in Minnesota in 1917, in a community of Norwegian farmers. I grew up speaking Norwegian and English impartially; my parents' stories made the old country as real to me as America, and it seemed a second home.

It was when I was in my senior year at the University of Minnesota that the Germans invaded Norway, and I quit school, went to Canada and joined the army. I was given a commission in Intelligence, and was in England before too long a time had passed. I underwent a great deal more training there, and went on a couple of minor missions. In addition I served as an instructor, and ground through endless months of desk work. At last my big assignment came. I was ordered on a mission to Norway. My faultless Norwegian, my appearance, and my background had given me this job.

My mouth went pretty dry during the preliminary briefing. I was to land on the south coast of Norway from a submarine, take ashore a supply of the new limpet bombs, contact the Norwegian Underground, instruct them in the use of the bombs, and then get out—if I could. I wiped the sweat from my palms, and kept my face expressionless.

"Major Weathers has your credentials and clothes ready over in his office," the CO finished, then thrust out his hand. "Good luck, Holm. Keep a close eye on the Underground. The organization's new yet, and we'd like to know how far they'll go."

A LITTLE less than a week later, in the darkest part of a Norwegian August night, I was crawling gingerly from the deck of a submarine onto a rubber boat that was already laden with my limpet bombs. Right alongside the sub a barren islet of steep rock thrust against the starless sky. The sub had emerged just alongside, so that its blip on the German radar screen would blend into that of the tiny island.

"Good luck, Lieutenant," the ensign whispered in my ear. "The men here'll paddle you in. We're right on time. Cheerio."

Noislessly we drifted away from the sub and slipped into the narrowing cove ahead. It was pitch black; the clouds had been a break for me. It wasn't cold, but I was shivering. My teeth chattered from nervousness; momentarily I expected the men with me to tell me to knock off the bloody noise, but they didn't.

The smell of land, of kelp and wet rocks grew strong. Gray rocky shores slipped by. I made out a blur of a rough stone dock ahead. The boat touched.

A dark shadow moved on the pier. A voice whispered hoarsely:

"Eric Bjornson?"

That was the name on my credentials and the password. I made my answer.

"Yes, Finn?"

There was a soft grunt of satisfaction. A hand reached down to mine, and swung me ashore. The packsacks of bombs followed and the rubber boat was swallowed up in the night.

There were three men with me on the dock. Each of us, without words, picked up a packsack and moved quietly down a narrow path. The salt wind blew freshly as we stole along; I could smell the heather crushed under foot and a scent of fish drifted around us. A building loomed; a door creaked; and we slipped inside.

"This way, friend," murmured Finn, in Norwegian. He led me across the hut, shoved aside a fishnet that was hung across a corner, and indicated a pile of blankets.

"Sleep quietly," he went on. "I will come to you in the morning, and we will discuss plans. Everything is prepared. You are safe for tonight. So long." He went away. . . . To my surprise, I slept. Suspense and fear are tiring.

Finn came early the next morning, bringing hard bread and some boiled codfish. He was a sturdy yet slender man of forty or so, wearing rubber boots, dark trousers stuffed into them, and a dark blue jersey, and he watched me narrowly as I ate. I was wearing well-used knickers, gray stockings, a light blue shirt, dark string tie and an elbow-patched flannel coat.

"There are many people down here at Tjome Island from Oslo for a few days' summer holiday. It is allowed. You are supposed to be a school teacher from Oslo. You had better come outside and fish from the rocks. It will look natural; the Germans might search this hut, and if they found you hiding—" He didn't finish the sentence, making it more expressive than any words could have.

The day was long. I fished from the rocks all day, catching a few small fish.

Once, in early afternoon, a truck drove up, and a half dozen German soldiers climbed down. There were a number of people around; they acted as if the soldiers weren't there. They looked right through them, and the air was filled with a sort of aura of cold hatred. The soldiers perfunctorily checked papers. One of them walked in my direction, and I got out my forged identification. The gray card had my picture and a description: "*Eric Bjornson. School teacher. Oslo University. Ration number G 267 1 18. Five ten. Brown hair. Blue eyes. Weight 165.*" The height and weight were metric of course, but I mentally translated to the familiar system as I glanced at the card. The approaching German saw the gray object in my hand and turned away. I breathed again.

LATE in the afternoon I saw a young man approaching me, whistling cheerfully as he walked across the rocks. He was dressed much as I was, but was inches shorter. His round, light face was young and unlined, his eyes blue and carefree, and his straw-colored hair blew in the wind. He seemed not to have a care in the world. He smiled at me, and sat down beside me, producing a pipe and pouch as he did so.

"I'm Arne, your courier for the next stretch. We leave soon after dark. Finn has the material. Did you have a good trip?"

He spoke in a natural, carefree voice. No one was close enough to hear, and one would never have taken us for conspirators. He laughed aloud as if I'd said something funny.

"Sure. Fine trip. Are we all right?"

"Don't know. Pretty hard to get off of an island. That's why Tjome was picked; the Germans'd never ex-

pect a man to be landed here. We'll make it, I think. Look! You've got a bite!"

We had dinner in Finn's clean, cluttered house. Finn brought out a bottle half-full of an amber liquid. Arne's eyes lit up.

"*A litt dæmm. Good, Finn. Good. Your glass, Eric.*"

He filled the glasses. We each took our dram of aquavit. Arne looked to the three of us, and stood up. He lifted his glass.

"To Haakon, Norway and her allies. *Skaal!*"

"*Skaal!*" we each murmured, and drank the liquid down. I was able to breathe normally in three or four minutes. Arne grinned at the tears in my eyes.

"Good aquavit goes down like eels through jellyfish, friend; but this wartime ersatz is made out of sawdust. You want to be used to it."

After I quit coughing, the warm glow in my stomach was pleasant, and the boiled cod went down well.

THE short August night was at its deepest when Arne led me across the heather to a Fiat parked in a small pine grove. The four racksacks were pitched carelessly in the back seat. The little engine roared and then hummed, we backed, turned, and skimmed off down the narrow winding road.

"Are you allowed to drive like this?" I asked.

"No," answered Arne. I couldn't take much comfort from that.

After fifteen minutes, Arne said: "We're coming to the bridge now, Eric. Here's where we need luck!"

The bridge was a beautiful, suspended arch across the narrow water separating Tjome from the mainland. We started across it. A shout arose as we passed the entrance.

"Stop!" a loud voice bawled, in German. "Stop, or I fire!"

We didn't stop. A shot rang out: my stomach froze; my heart stopped. A pair of car lights flashed on at the other end of the narrow road; a vehicle, undoubtedly German, was blocking the narrow bridge!

Arne swore softly and jammed on the brakes.

"Can you swim?"

"Yes!"

"They'll torture you if they catch you. Follow me!"

Arne was out of the car like a cat. I as quickly. Shouts arose from each end of the bridge. Running footsteps drew close. They weren't shooting; they wanted to take us alive.

"Off of the bridge!" cried Arne in my ear. "Feet first."

I gasped with fear. The bridge was a good eighty feet over the water. Arne grabbed the rail, patted my



shoulder quickly, and vaulted over. I followed, just as a couple of soldiers lunged at me. . . .

I died numberless deaths in my whirling fall. The starry sky revolved around me; wind pushed me like a solid force; and the world exploded into light as I hit the water.

Its coldness revived me at once, and I fought my way to the surface, strangling. A voice called:

"Eric! Eric!"

I answered, dizzily, sick with shock and fright. Then I felt a hand on my shoulder.

Arne's voice said:

"Stay in the shadow of the bridge. Swim quietly after me."

WE moved toward the mainland shore. Shots sounded from above. They didn't see us, and were shooting at random. The water shallowed, we waded ashore and thrust into the thick

brush. I was numb with despair; my mission was irretrievably lost, and I was undoubtedly lost with it.

Arne grasped my shoulder.

"Quick. Up the bank! They'll be expecting us to go up or downstream. See? They're all scattering up and down on the banks. Follow me."

We climbed directly up under the bridge. Volleys of shouts arose from the shores on each side of us and across the water. Torches glowed. An occasional shot rang out as some man thought he saw a shape running, or swimming.

Where was this madman taking me? We gained the roadway, but instead of running into the woods, he swung back onto the bridge. "Surely," I thought, "the shock has driven him mad! He's heading for the German car!"

He was. It was deserted, but it was facing the wrong way and couldn't

be turned on the bridge. Our car blocked the way to the island.

But Arne had no idea of returning to the island. He got into the staff car, released the brake, and let it roll gently to one side. Then he swung down under the dash, ripped out a handful of wires, leaped out, and we ran across the bridge, still apparently not sighted by the searching Germans who were concentrating on the banks.

LUCKILY OUR Fiat was across the center of the bridge, and the way was downhill. We slipped in; Arne released the brake; and we rolled soundlessly down the slope. We were level with the German car when angry shouts arose down the banks, startled curses filled the night, and a shot rang out, followed by others. Something whammed into the rear of the car and screamed away. Arne threw in the clutch; the engine roared, and

Illustrated by
John
McDermott



"One moment, Norski. Let's have a look in that pack sack of yours." My heart stopped. Karen had been unable to restrain an audible gasp of fear.

the little car shot like an arrow off of the bridge and into the winding road, where a curve quickly hid us from the running Germans.

AND in that wild moment I heard Arne laugh!

Soon we turned from the main road, and took a narrow track up into the mountains. For hours we drove through thick pine forests over a wretched excuse for a road. Arne took the Fiat where I would have thought only a jeep could go.

At last when the stars were paling out and the smell of dawn was beginning to fill the air, we drove into a clearing. Arne got out, telling me to wait in the car. He was back in a moment. He drove by a building, into a sort of courtyard, up a steep ramp and into the quiet, hay- and cattle-scented darkness of a barn. Stiffly I got out.

"Got any more liquid sawdust, Arne? I sure need some!"

Arne, chuckling, preceded me into the loft. We lay down on the hay; exhausted by tension and exertion, we slept.

Later in the day when we woke, refreshed, I met others of the Underground. They were sturdy, ordinary-looking men. They took three of the rucksacks, each holding two of the limpets, and moved off into the woods. No names were mentioned, nor would be. Arne was not the real name of my guide. No one was told the identity, when avoidable, of anyone else in the organization. Grim experience had taught them that those captured were tortured, and in such a way that a man could hardly hope to keep from talking. If they knew no names, they couldn't give them. Hard on the captured man, but vitally necessary for the safety of all. Arne took my

hand, grinned farewell at me, hoisted a pack to his shoulders and followed the men into the woods.

"You get another courier here," he'd told me as he said good-by. "A much nicer one. I envy you."

I stood there by the door of the farmhouse, looking after him and wondering what he'd meant. The farmer who lived here approached me and said:

"Your guide is in the house, friend. Come in, please."

The house, sturdily built of logs, with paint and carving on the door, was simply and plainly furnished inside. There was a girl standing by the window of the parlor. When I saw her, I lost all interest in the furnishings of the house.

I THOUGHT then, and I still think, that she was the most beautiful girl I have ever seen.

When she saw me staring from the doorway, she smiled and came toward me with her hand outstretched. I met the hand; as our hands clasped, she curtsied slightly, and I remembered to bow in return.

She was slender and sweetly curved; her hair was of living gold, her eyes bright blue and clear, and her heart-shaped face was tanned a golden brown. Her lips were red without lipstick, and their smile showed pearly teeth. The smile changed to a pleasant laugh at my astonishment.

"Are you my new guide?" I stuttered.

"Why, yes. Didn't they tell you? It was decided that the safest way to get you to Oslo would be for us to go as husband and wife, on bicycles. Don't you think it's a good idea?" She looked anxious for a moment. I hastened to assure her that I thought it was a wonderful idea.

"I will call you Eric," she went on, "and you may call me Karen. It's not my real name, but it's one I've always liked. Are you ready to go, *mein Mann*?" She smiled as she said "my husband," but something, perhaps the look in my eyes, made her lose the smile and become sweetly grave.

Two bicycles were ready outside. Each had a rucksack strapped to the luggage-carrier, and they were battered and stained with use.

"There's one bomb in each sack, friend," said my farmer host. Not even a false name had been given me for him. "We were afraid that both in one rucksack might make it seem suspiciously heavy."

I started to protest, but he waved it aside with a laugh.

"I'll wager, friend, that the Froken will carry the weight very well, and will tire you out in the bargain. You don't know our Norwegian girls, Herr

American. We raise them right, strong to work for us, so that we may loaf."

"Strong also to beat lazy husbands," laughed Karen, casting a mock threatening look at me. "Come, husband, let us go."

The farmer lost his gay look as we departed. When I looked back, he still stood motionless, a look of sorrow and anger now on his face. I knew what he thought. I thought it myself. To have to use so lovely and young a girl for such a purpose, knowing fully what her fate would be if she were caught! It was horrible; and yet, seeing her gay courage, I could only be inspired and uplifted.

Our way lay along a narrow trail through the pine forests. At times we had to wade and push the bicycles with their loads. The bombs weighed some thirty pounds each; this relative lightness was an important part of their many advantages. Each had four strong magnets, and a chemical fuse. They were designed to be stealthily attached to the metal sides of a ship, below the water, four to six to a side. Some twelve hours after they were set, they would explode, and their relatively weak charges would be sufficient to smash holes, below the water line, in the ship's sides. They were expected to be deadly things.

The woods were a beautiful green and gold in the summer sun. Thick moss made a velvet carpet on each side of the path; the rays of sunlight made shafts of golden light where they pierced through the trees. A late cuckoo called somewhere up on the mountain. Orange cantarella mushrooms made splotches of color against the moss, and once we passed a number of the little red toadstools with the white dots that looked as if little Nissen, or elves, should be playing about their fairy ring.

"There will be much snow this winter," remarked Karen, pointing to a mountain ash, upon which the red-orange berries hung in heavy clusters. "See how many *rognebaer* there are?"

"Is that an infallible sign?"

"Yes. It never fails; the good Lord always provides many berries for the birds and animals if a hard winter comes."

Through the rest of the day we talked of many things; intimacy grew rapidly, grew as it must in an atmosphere of danger, in the present surroundings of beauty, and with the catalyst of our common cause. I longed to ask her of herself, her name, her age, what she did. But I couldn't. It was obvious that she was very well educated; she spoke English with hardly any accent, though she spoke it only once.

We camped in a pine grove that night. Sleeping-bags were in the rucksacks, and food. The fire made a small glow in the dusk, lighting up the under needles of the sheltering trees. We let it go out as soon as we had cooked; then sat together in companionship in the still dark.

In spite of fear, this was becoming for me one of the most pleasant experiences of my life; the pleasure was increased by the fact that, without even the touch of hands, we lay side by side in our sleeping-bags, and talked quietly as the bright stars revolved beyond the lace of the branches. . . .

The second day, Karen's quick ears saved us. She caught a distant splinter of German gutturals; like a flash she pulled me down; we inched off the trail with our bicycles, and hid in a ravine as a German patrol stalked down the trail. We waited for ten minutes after they disappeared, then took to the trail once more, while one of the little Norwegian squirrels, with his ears surmounted by long tufts of hair that made him look horned, scolded us from the wayside.

That night too was passed in companionship, warm and pleasant, yet innocent as Adam and Eve before the serpent. Sometime in the night, while asleep, I must have extended my arm toward Karen; when I awoke in the morning, our hands were lightly clasped on the pine needles between our sleeping-bags. I didn't move my hand; she squeezed it gently while still asleep, and blushed very becomingly when she noticed it, awake. The blush vanished in a grave and steady questioning look. My heart pounded as I returned the look. It said more than words.

"We'll be in Oslo tonight," she murmured as we picked up the rucksacks after a hasty breakfast.

"I wish it were a hundred miles yet!" I found myself saying. She looked at me without smiling.

"And I too, Eric. To think, I don't even know your name!"

We kissed, briefly, coolly at first, then with warmth and passion. She stroked my hair lightly once, then pulled away, and we went off down the trail.

At noon our trail came out on a hard-surfaced road. Before leaving the shelter of the forest, we kissed once more; then, stepping from enchantment into hard danger, we went out on the road.

In an hour we were in Solihgydo; in the next hour we met two truckloads of German soldiers. They jeered, and shouted ribald remarks at Karen as they drove past. She was pale with anger, and I myself found my hatred of them stronger than ever before.

There were many Norwegians on the road, mostly on bicycles. This was Sunday, and they were returning from their beloved forests and mountains to the drab and frightened existence of the city. At Sandvika, where we swung out onto the Drammen to Oslo road, a squad of German soldiers stood ready. They eyed us as we went stolidly past, but made no move to stop us.

HALFWAY between Sandvika and Oslo, our luck ran out. We came to a road blockade where soldiers were examining papers and questioning. I looked dumbly at Karen. She was pale, but she smiled back at me as we took our places at the end of a long line of frightened people. I thought, wryly, as we moved slowly forward, of times in the past when I'd dreaded standing in line to get a typhoid shot. If only that were all awaiting us now!

Karen went through first. She gave her name to a leering sergeant, and indicating me as her husband. The man looked her up and down, and said something in German to his comrades. They laughed, but Karen was let through. Now it was my turn.

"Name?" barked the sergeant.

"Eric Bjornson." I made my answer surly and cold. Nothing would make them as suspicious as friendliness. They knew they were hated.

"Identification."

I passed over the card. He looked it over, looked at me, handed it back. He questioned me as to where I'd been. I told him on a cycling vacation in the mountains. He accepted this without question, started to wave me through the barrier. Then suddenly he said:

"One moment, Norskis. Let's have a look in that pack-sack of yours."

My heart stopped; then it sank. Karen, standing close, had been unable to restrain a gasp of fear, plainly audible. The sergeant looked hard at her, and motioned to a man who stepped forward and took Karen's arm.

The rucksack was torn open. Karen's eyes dilated with fear. Then she gasped again as the searcher withdrew from halfway down in the sack, a neatly wrapped bundle. As it came out, Karen broke into tears. There were murmurs of anger and fear from the Norwegians waiting behind us.

"Aha!" leered the sergeant. "Let's see what the Fräulein has that she values so much!"

They unwrapped the bundle, to disclose twenty or so eggs and a large block of butter. Karen wept harder, tearfully explaining that she wanted the butter and eggs for a cake for her mother's birthday feast. The Germans laughed, and the sergeant rather

disgruntledly passed the package to one of his men. Then we got a snarled lecture on the evils of scrounging for food over our rations; the sergeant took down our names and addresses in Oslo, and let us through with a warning. I tried to walk with dejection as we started down the road. Karen appeared to be crushed. She was still weeping when we rounded the curve in the road; then our frightened smiles met for a moment. I know there was vast respect and contrition added to the love in my eyes. I'd been furious at her over that gasp of fear. Man! There was a girl for you!

Dusk was deep and kind as we entered upon the cobbles of Drammensveien in Oslo. A mile inside of the city we turned down a side-street from Bygdø Alle, passed through an open courtyard with chestnut trees and a bench, and slipped through a small side door that opened at Karen's knock. The copper taste of fear faded from my tongue at our quiet and pleasant reception.

That night I gave a demonstration of the bombs to a dozen intent men. I didn't have to repeat a word; the hungry glances they fastened on the bombs were more eloquent than any words on their part could have been.

As I left the room, to go to the bedroom assigned to me for a few hours' sleep before leaving Oslo, a soft hand touched my arm. I turned to see Karen smiling at me.

We kissed there in the hall. She clung to me fiercely, and her smiles and laughter changed to quiet sobs. I'd never felt that way before; I knew then that I held in my arms the thing most precious to me in all the world.

"I should have gone before now," she said to me. "I waited because I had to see you again. Oh, Eric! I won't ask who you are, but I'll tell you who I am and where you can find me, some day, if we're lucky, and if you want to."

"Want to!" I groaned. "Wanting isn't the word for it! But, Karen, darling, I can't know your name. I can't. I still might be caught."

She shuddered at my words, and her grip tightened. We kissed once more and stepped apart.

"I must go, Eric. Good-by."

"We'll meet again, Karen! We'll meet again. I love you!"

"And I love you, Eric." Her voice was quiet and sad. The burden of her knowledge of the chances against us weighed her voice with sorrow. I tried to banish that same sorrow from my voice when I answered.

"We'll meet again. After the war, I'll come back to Norway, and I'll wait every day on that bench in the courtyard, under the chestnut trees. I'll wait there until you come, Karen."



"Oh, Eric! I'll tell you who I am; and some day, if we're lucky—"

"I'll wait for you too, Eric. And now, good-by."

I tried to hold on to her as you hold, half awake, to a lovely dream, but she slipped from my arms and was gone—gone like the lovely dream.

That night I was taken out of Oslo. Two days later my guides led me across the Swedish border, and a week afterward I was in England again.

Two things greeted me upon arrival. One was the definite news that a German ship had been sunk by limpet bombs in Oslo fjord. The second was, that my transfer to the U.S. Army had come through, and that I was ordered back to the United States for reassignment.

FATE and the Army sent me from home to the Pacific, and long, hard bloody years of war passed before I saw the green mountains of Norway again. I'd come as soon as I could,

but the war had been over two years before I made it. I'd written the Norwegian authorities. They'd been kind and helpful, but to no avail.

So now I was in Oslo, sitting on the bench, under the chestnut trees in the courtyard of the house on Bygdø Alle. As I looked up at its gray walls I could hear the last echoes of Karen's voice.

And then, and then—as I sat and looked at the house, something seemed to drag me around. Something great and good and warm faced me around! I looked to the street.

And there was Karen. Her golden hair was free in the breeze, her eyes bright. Her slender arms were outstretched to me as she walked, slowly, then faster, across the cobbled court.

I stood up, and the wind was sweet with lilacs, and we walked into each other's arms like wanderers coming home.

This Is the Land

If robots became too perfect, and we became
a race of Frankenstein creatures.

BY NELSON BOND

Illustrated by Charles Chickering

This is the land which ye/Shall divide by lot. And neither division nor unity/Matters. This is the land. We have our inheritance.

T. S. Eliot: *Ash Wednesday*

I WONDER what it feels like to be dead?

It is cold; that I know. Our father's flesh was cold when at the last we bore him, as he had enjoined, up the long, winding ramps and lifting clines: through the great caverns and the massive locks that, as we left them, wheezed asthmatic sighs into the wider corridors beyond; out past the tangled webs of flame-scorched steel and crumbled stone to the vast silence of the bleak Outside.

There in the hollow of a cratered plain, where each unlevel thing etched shadows sharp and jet against the fierce white fury of the sands, we scratched for him a final resting place. And there, as he had bade, we buried him. Despite the searing sunlight, he was cold. His flesh was cold; so were those eyes and lips that ever had been warm with kindliness.

We were four who bore our father on his last journey. The others all were younger than myself. With staring wonder and a speechless awe they gaped about them at the strange Outside. They left, I think, a troubling sort of dread.

But I felt more, for I had read the books. And so I knew a sorrow and regret. For in the old writings I had voyaged here before, had seen this land as it had used to be. In my mind's roaming I had looked upon the fields of dancing grass, had seen the rainbow myriads of flowers curtsying and dancing in the summer breeze, had glimpsed the swift, heart-stopping flight of birds curving like gaudy darts across the sky to alight and sway, sure-footed, rich with song, upon the frothing boughs of green-gowned trees.

But now all this was gone. The earth was bare. No brooks ran purling through these bitter wastes. Here were no pastures, forests, meadow-

lands. Only the harsh, raw tegument of earth remained. Like gaunt, bleached skulls of stone, bare rocks upthrust from sterile dunes of sand. Dried beds of vanished streams carved meaningless deep symbols in the plain. And overhead, a huge, sky-quartering sun burned down in naked fury on a crust split with great scars, pockmarked with detritus, and seamed with scabs of metal molten, then congealed.

All, all was silence. No air stirred the waste, no sound whispered nature's dirge. And no bird sang.

I will arise and go now, and go to Innis-free,

And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made;

*Nine bean rows will I have there, a hive for the honey bee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.*

This was the sort of song they used to sing.

"It will not last forever, our imprisonment." Thus said my father once. "Now we are forced to dwell beneath the earth, a helpless race of new world troglodytes. Here we must live because we have no choice. But in the great, wise fullness of God's time, you will go forth again one day. One day again there will be green on earth. One day again, grant God, there will be life."

"It is finished?" asked the youngest of my brothers. The grave was dug, our father placed therein; the last slow shovelful of sifting sand had filled the fresh wound on oft-wounded earth. The mound already blended with the plain. I shook my head.

"Not yet," I said. "Not yet." I opened the volume I had brought Outside. The straight black lines of printing marched in bold relief against the clean bone-whiteness of the page. "We are to read the book, our father said. Within it, he has marked the passages."

My brothers bowed their heads, as they had been taught. I read the words to them, and to the mound.



*By the waters of Babylon
There we sat down, yea, we wept,
When we remembered Zion.*

You will not easily believe these things (my father said), but they are true. They are written in the books for you to read. Men lie, but books do not. Men cheat, but pictures tell the truth. In the books you will find pictures of the world which we had built.

We had great cities, dotting all the earth. Cities with buildings reaching to the sky, spires of stone and glass and shining steel. They glowed with life by day and light by night; be-



neath the rooftops of their countless homes mankind laid plans for great accomplishments or, privately, dreamed dreams of new success and happiness.

We were a race of moonstruck engineers, of worker-ants who builded as we dreamed. Our wide, broad highways spanned the miles between our busiest hives; our bridges hurdled the rivers; if there were mountains standing in our way, we bored a die-straight passage through their hearts.

Giddy with knowledge, and overwhelmed with pride, we had subjected nature to our needs. Our swift trains crossed wide continents on shining rails, our ocean-going vessels were

man-made islands, the air our domain. Nature herself had made no bird so powerful as those sky-giants in which we dared not just the clouds, but the thin air above the atmosphere.

There is too much to tell; I will not try. But if you can, imagine two billion souls bustling about in a never-ending search for knowledge, greater luxury, always the newer, finer, larger thing. That will give you some idea of how we lived. The world itself was not enough for us. In my young manhood, eyes turned toward the stars. The first experimental rockets had been launched. It was believed by every thinking man

that within twenty years, or more or less, Earth's children would set foot upon the moon.

All the old foes of man—save one—we had subdued. Famine and poverty we held in check. The elements were harnessed to our will; earth, fire, air and water bowed before our scientific cunning and our skill. In spotless halls of healing we conspired to restrain the ravages of plague and pestilence; in the last double decade of our greatness we had lengthened man's life-span more than thirty years. Thus we had checked all mankind's greatest foes—save one. That one was man himself.

*With speechless awe they gaped
about them at the strange Outside.*

We had probed nature's secrets. But one thing we had not learned. We had not learned humility. We had not learned to live together.

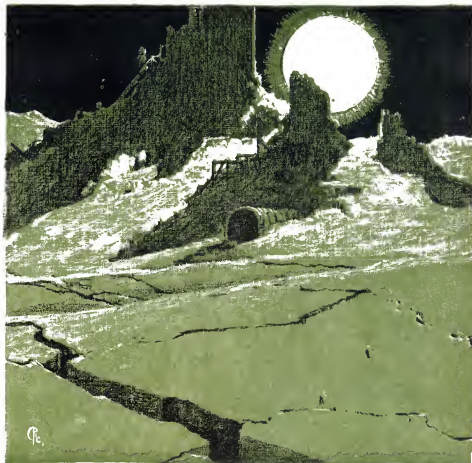
There were three wars, each greater than the last, each longer than the one preceding it. The first was fought in the old-fashioned way: man against man, brute force against brute force. But there were innovations. At its end, for the first time we dipped into our new arsenal of scientific lore. We pitted steel against weak flesh and blood; the clash of steel on shield was drowned beneath the roar of long-range guns and rumbling tanks. We fought with gas and flame; into the air we hurled our early, awkward, clumsy birds of prey. This was the last great battle of the apes.

The second was a laboratory war. Each side had its armies, true; but the decisive battles were not waged in the field. The victories were won in tiny rooms where men drew diagrams and plotted formulae. Man-governed seacraft had no chance against robot-controlled projectiles of destruction. It was a war of rockets, radar, reason. The hand of death fell heaviest on those who bore no arms and wore no uniforms. Its prelude was a shrill, hysterical voice screaming wild threats around the world on unseen wires of electric force; its curtain was a greasy pall of smoke mushrooming over the ruin of what had been a city. This was the last great battle of the people.

The third war was the strangest war of all, because most fighters in its ranks did not know that they had been conscripted. It was a war of minds, and of ideas; of overtones and psychic influence. It was fought with phrases, spoken and concealed, with arguments and coldly chosen words. It was a bloodless war—if that war can be called bloodless which leaves its wounds only upon the hearts and minds of men. It was the most deadly of the three great wars because it took its toll on all mankind, the rich, the poor, the humble and the proud; the old, the young, the weak and the strong; inexorably and indiscriminately, alike.

For years no man encountered sudden, brutal death upon a battle-ground. But no man knew a complete happiness. For ever there was strife and bickering, troubling disquiet and a never ending fear. Uncertainty and doubt were the weapons of this war, furrowed brows its chevrons, sick hearts its wound-strips. This was the last great battle of the minds.

The final act was not a war at all. Rather, it was the inevitable conse-



quence of that dejection into which the third, the war of nerves, had plunged mankind. It was a last wild gesture of despair. It was race suicide impelled by years of dread, achieved in seconds of fury.

A finger pressed a button; somewhere a contact closed. And in an instant, earth and sky were a ball of flame. This was the last great battle. . . .

*"I will utterly consume all things
From off the land," saith the Lord.
"I will consume man and beast;
I will consume the fowls of the
heaven, and the fishes of the sea,
And the stumblingblocks with the
wicked;
And I will cut off man from off the
land,"
Saith the Lord.*

I will tell you how it was (my father said) that we were spared . . .

In that now long-gone day, I was a scientist. With a handful of my fellows I worked in these caverns carefully concealed beneath the surface of the earth. Ours was a very furtive enterprise—"top secret" was the phrase used in those days to describe the nature of our work. You have seen the machines; you know that which we studied: The atom, and its fearsome potentialities.

There were eight of us here on the Day of Death. I was the youngest;

the others have long since gone. Six were men, two women. Our laboratories were well-equipped and stocked with food supplies for indeterminately great lengths of time, carefully calculated to be self-sustaining in such stores as water and the precious air of life. Because we worked so far beneath the surface, perforce our air supply was artificial; further, we had a series of buffering locks preventing leakage to the corridors.

It was this safety measure which spared us. To our great depth and isolation, to those thin chambers of steel, we are indebted for our lives. For when the Fire came, and after it the great emptiness, our caverns shook and trembled—but endured.

You know what happened. It is not enough merely to say it was the hydrogen bomb. That is a specious explanation, and one which is, at best, guesswork. For all we know, the spark may have been created by the fission of some entirely different element; we have no way of knowing, now, with what forces our enemy experimented.

All we do know is that someone blundered. Someone failed to take into account the known fact that earth's atmosphere, the breath of life itself, was to one-fifth comprised of oxygen, the greatest supporter of combustion known. When that first



spark unleashed its chain reaction—well, we do not know. But in the space of seconds everything that crept or walked or flew on the Outside was ended. The conquered and the conquerors alike, the dreamers and the clods too dull to dream, were motes in one brief flame that filled the sky an instant—until earth's envelope of atmosphere was gone, and the bleak cold of interstellar space moved in to claim the globe which it had spawned.

The rest I need not tell; you have the records. In them we have set forth the history of our subterranean life. You know how through the creeping years we lived; how we grew produce hydroponically to sustain life, how we continued our research, striving ever to find a way of restoring to earth its envelope of air, how here below the surface you came into being—pathetic offspring of a dwindling few who dared not think of earth without some hope, without some semblance of its former self, to carry on the work we had begun.

All this was years ago; now I am old. The others, one by one, have gone to rest. Enright and Thomas, laughing Jane O'Neill, who to the end would never give up hope, Staniewicz and Levine, Grace Dumont and McDowell—all, all are gone, and I am left alone, last of the elders, last of those futile few who walked unscathed from the celestial pyre.

Soon I must go; like them, I would be borne to the Outside, there at the end to have my ashes mingle with the dust of that mankind of which I was a part.

But when I go, you must not grieve my loss. Particularly, you must not give up hope. It will not last forever, our imprisonment. Now we are forced to dwell beneath the earth, a helpless race of new-world troglodytes. Here we must live because we have no choice. But in the great, wise fullness of God's time, you will go forth again one day. One day again there will be green on earth. One day again, grant God, there will be life. This is the land—and you are its inheritors.

*I will praise thee; for I am fearfully
and wonderfully made:
Marvellous are thy works;
And that my soul knoweth right well.
My substance was not hid from thee,
When I was made in secret,
And curiously wrought in the lowest
parts of the earth.*

I closed the book and my brothers raised their heads.

"It is finished?" asked the youngest. I nodded. We left the mound. In the skies, where the sun was not, against the jet of space the stars burned with a tiny, diamond pain. Slowly we left the Outside, passed through the empty caverns and the

sighing locks, down the long ramps and tortuous inclines, to the snug haven in the bowels of earth which is our lonely empire.

There I dispatched the others to their daily tasks. Our father said the efforts must go on; I am the eldest, it devolves on me henceforth to make the plans—and the decisions.

Some little while I sat in brooding thought. Then I arose and made my daily rounds. I saw once more the vats and crucibles, the laboratories where my brothers work. To the broadcasting room I went at last. This was a routine that must not be ignored. "Elsewhere on earth," my father oft had said, "there may be other caves. Within them other men may live, and, like ourselves, strain to make contact with their own lost kind." I pulsed a signal to the silent world. The world, as always, gave back no reply.

So, at the last, I came back to this room. It was my father's room; here are the books in which he read, the books in which he wrote. Here, in thin lines upon time-faded sheets, he has inscribed the swan-song of mankind. And here today I have appended this—my tribute to his memory.

*But those that wait upon the Lord,
they shall inherit the earth.*

So it is written; so the father told. But—is it worth it? Is it worth our while to seek and strive, to gain new foothold on an earth sheared bare of loveliness and warmth? What if one day again the earth be green? Will it be home to us who were not born of it? What though we people earth once more, rebuild its cities, pick up again the thwarted dreams of man and carry his ambitions to the stars. Will it have any meaning to us, any joy?

I think not. And I think my father erred in saying we must carry on his work. Now he is gone, life holds for us no purpose. We who inherit hold as valueless the bequest that our dying father left.

Therefore some moments hence I touched the switch; the master switch that governs the controls that feed my robot brothers with false life. Now they stand silent at their silent posts, motionless tributes to man's last, great effort to perpetuate his kind—a race of metal images of man. It is too bad there were no children born of those last eight who outlived earth's last day.

Now, in a moment, I shall touch the switch upon my breast; the switch which gives me life. Then I, too, shall be silent with the rest.

I wonder what it feels like to be dead?



Rearguard Action

THE road dipped into a depression and was blocked by the blackened hull of a T-34; and as far as Sergeant Cassidy could figure, they were about four miles north of Chonan. If so, Taejon was at least thirty miles further south. It was hard to know, because the part of the map he wanted had been utilized for personal reasons some days before. Anyway, it was the day Captain Carlson had ordered Cassidy to "take those two men" and hold the sunken road until relieved.

So three men had huddled there for two-three days already, and still no relief. Cassidy figured the gooks must be all around them by now; and could have advanced all the way to Taejon; but there was no way of knowing, because Pfc. Gefski, who had been assigned to the walkie-talkie,

had no idea how to use the instrument; and whenever Cassidy tried, all he got was Chink chatter or transmitter hum. There was never any response when they tried to use the call letters assigned them. No way of knowing whether they had been recalled or ordered to take up another position.

It was bitter cold, and a swirl of granular snow swept over the shoulder of the roadbed and rasped a pleaded design against the turret and between the crippled treads of the gutted tank. There was a neat hole about the size of a beer can just between the two front hatches, and the tank had torched and stayed there. What was left inside, none of the three men had so far bothered to investigate. Whatever it was, had been well barbecued at the time.

But the snow and the wind had done little about the stench of Korea—Land of Morning Calm. The exceptional standards of filthiness defied the gusty efforts of the elements; and the nearby rice paddies, nourished on sewage, still produced an all-pervading whiff. In the village to the rear, from where relief might some day emerge, Cassidy knew the odor would reach overpowering pungency.

Two days before, Lance Corporal Price had observed: "It is perhaps unfair to judge by this sample, but I've never seen a country that offers so little that might be called picturesque as a reward for the bloody misery some of us have experienced."

It was then that Sergeant Cassidy, U.S. Marine Corps, first realized he had a foreigner in his command, and he nourished a cold resentment. The

vague difference in Price's uniform had rung no gong, and Price's preference for that beat-up bonnet had been credited to some quartermaster's effort to provide winter equipment. There had been no time to consider the racial characteristics of the two men in his command, because he was too engrossed with his military responsibility for this holding action. The gooks hadn't appeared, and it was hard to know what to do. Cassidy was more comfortable charging into enemy strong points or hacking his way up a bloody beach.

Now he gets a guy who talks fancy English.

"What was that you said?" Cassidy asked from his post on top of the blackened tank. Then he reconsidered, and put it another way. "Look! What ought you in, bud? I mean, I don't get that Lance Corporal routine. Ain't you supposed to be in the infantry, with them clod-hoppers of yours?"

"Same as a one-striper," Price explained, but kept his eyes on the vee at the end of the road. "Just like Gefski. . . . First-class private."

"With rank like that, you should be wearing spurs," Cassidy said.

Price raised his Bren gun carefully and watched the road, but no target materialized, so he relaxed again. "In the artillery, I'd be a bombardier. I suppose it's a bit puzzling, but we're used to it. Tradition, I suppose you'd call it. I've been a sergeant twice, but with no war on. I'd take to fighting John Barleycorn."

"How come you happened to be hooked for this Barney?" asked Cassidy.

Price changed his ammo clip without taking his eyes from the road. "Bit odd, that. I'd been left up at Suwon, doing another holding job. Job was done, so I walked out. Only one left, as a matter of fact. Couldn't find my platoon, so I was picked up by some of your chaps. Spot of fodder—no tea, of course; and next thing, I was taken on strength of Sergeant Cassidy's squad. Proper United Nations formula, what?"

"What the hell him say?" Gefski inquired from the other side of the tank.

There were times during the next two days that Sergeant Cassidy tried to unscramble the explanation, but there were points utterly beyond him, so he reverted to worrying about how long they might be expected to hold on there, or whether there was an acceptable period of time before he might decide to withdraw. The rumble of distant gunfire or the harsh scrape of a rocket across the northern sky conspired to distract him, but he tried to come to some necessary decision. It was becoming dark now,

dusky-dark, and a raddled blossom swabbed a rusty warmth over a cottony cloud. He began to resent Price, his bonnet and the industrious manner in which he carried out his duties. The Englishman took orders well, accepting them with a stiffening of the shoulders that might have been a salute—only Cassidy sniffed and figured he was being ribbed.

It was all part of the load of command. The hours of huddling and waiting—the inactivity and idleness where a hundred ideas were conceived and discarded. All the vague phrases of the book or blackboard, cartwheeled through his mind. *Morale . . . Contact . . . Initiative . . . Field of Fire . . . Orders . . .* They hadn't fired a round since they'd moved in, and the inactivity was galling.

Cassidy sighed, and crawled up the ridge and peered over. There was nothing to see except a few jagged stumps of trees and the obscure undulations of the paddy banks. He wondered if a bulge at the base of one tree was worth a short burst, but his training warned him against any move that would give their position away.

Beyond the ridge, the landscape reminded him of somewhere in Pennsylvania. He had a gas station back there, just outside a place called Burnt Cabins. Never did find out how the place got that name. He was just born there, grew up there, and until he went into the Marines, no one had ever questioned him about Burnt Cabins. Two pumps, a sandwich shop and a grease rack built of cinder blocks over a depression alongside the shack. He had a jeep, too—for wreck jobs; and in the winter he bolted on a snow plow and made a few bucks cleaning out driveways.

Never any great decisions to make around Burnt Cabins. A guy toots for gas—you give him gas. They get six inches of snow and you plow driveways. Could be plenty of snow around Burnt Cabins now. Clean white snow, and the tang of pine from the hills when the sun came out. Not the stink that came up through the slush and sleet out here.

An American sergeant, a Briton who had fought a rearguard action at Dunkirk, and a man hitherto without a country, guard a withdrawal in Korea.

by ARCH
WHITEHOUSE

Illustrated by Brendan Lynch

He eased back and caught Price's eye. "Okay, take a break and get some sleep."

Price nodded and dropped lightly off the tread skirt.

The Englishman was medium tall and straight-legged. His face was bronzed and blocky under his bonnet. His nose, slim at the bridge, widened at the tip. His mouth was small and almost feminine, but his jaw made up for that. He went and squatted beside Gefski after he had placed his gun against a boggy wheel.

"Well, chum," he said quietly, "any news?"

Gefski turned two pathetic eyes until they were staring at the gleaming cap-badge on the side of Price's bonnet. "Gefski no damn good for soldier," he grumbled, and twirled a dial on the walkie-talkie. "You maybe should try, eh?"

Price shook his head and grinned. "Motor bikes are more in my line. Wireless—no!"

Gefski shook his head and slapped the heavy instrument in despair. "Why you no wear helmet?" he pleaded with another side-glance at Price's bonnet. "One day, you get killed."

The Englishman pawed his headgear deeper over his eyes and laughed softly. "Look too bloody much like a warrior," he replied, and reclined against the snow-packed embankment. "Where's your home Gefski?"

"Got no home. Gefski a no-home man. Sometimes Russia. Sometimes Latvia. Sometimes Poland—always prison camps," the Pfc. said, and put his ear to the instrument again.

"You sound like a displaced—" Price sat up suddenly and studied the whisker-fringed face of Gefski. The man looked back at him with the warm affection of one who appreciated sympathy and understanding. His helmet framed an ancient face hammered to the harsh planes of pain and poverty—fringed with heavy brows and scarred with coarse saliva-crusts lips. His cheekbones showed high under the tight parchment skin, and many an artist would have paid him just to sit and stare. "You mean to say—you were a D.P.?"

Gefski nodded slowly, and added no comment.

"Bloody interesting," Price said, and began rolling a cigarette between his fingers. He flipped it to Gefski and reclined again. "They damn soon called you up, didn't they?"

A twin-engined bomber rumbled across the leaden sky dragging two flame pennons, and Gefski waited until it had muffled its roar in a cloud. "Not called up. Gefski get smart in America."

"Ah, the Army's a good berth there."



"Looks like a patrol. Slipping through those trees," Price said.

Good money and plenty of grub. No tea, of course, but I suppose you get used to it."

"Gefski serve in Army, and Gefski be citizen," the man with the walkie-talkie said confidentially. "Just answer few questions, know how to write name and say 'George Washington.' Then Gefski a citizen."

"So that's the game," Price commented, and sat alert when Cassidy moved over the ridge. "An improvement in the pay and mess-book too, I suppose."

GEFSKI drew deep, his first drag. "No get more money. Gefski can vote—after he serve in Army. T'irty years old, and Gefski never vote. We get back New York City; Gefski see a judge and the judge smile and give Gefski a new flag. After that, Gefski

go anywhere, no papers, no permits—nothing."

"Be a bit of a change for you, won't it? Bloody rough for you chaps in Europe. Never liked Europe myself—what bit I saw of it. I'll take Clapham Common any day."

Gefski sat half-smiling at his prospects while he fiddled with the radio. "You citizen?" he asked.

"No. That is, I don't rightly know. I've never voted, either. Never been home or anywhere where I could. These bloody wars. I suppose I could say I was."

"You no got American flag?" Gefski asked in amazement.

Price cranked to his elbows. "Didn't you know? I'm English, Gefski—Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders." And Price laughed. "I suppose that proper mizzles you; an Englishman in

the Argylls, but we've always been in that mob. My dad was with them in the first do. All the Cockneys join the Jocks, and the Jocks enlist in the Grenadiers. Bloody good mob, though, Gefski. The original Thin Red Line, you know."

"What you doing in this Korea?" Gefski demanded.

Price grinned again. "What are we doing here? You tell me."

"Gefski become citizen."

"You've bloody well earned it," Price said, and rolled over on his side and considered the man with the walkie-talkie. Queer josses, Gefski. Had all his gear strapped or strung about him somewhere. Probably had never enjoyed so many possessions before, and was strengthening his claim by never relinquishing possession. His face a haunted mask, but his eyes

gleaned with the light of some hidden hope, and there was a crude tenderness in his hands, great spatulate hands that might have fashioned fine marble or performed delicate surgical operations with skill and dispatch. Gefski could tell some tales too, if he liked.

Price dropped off for a few snuffling minutes of the nourishing balm called sleep, exchanging a short bracket of time for a slim measure of vigor. He had no dreams, no short respite from the scenes of turmoil, no faces that reflected affection for him. Only the thin wall of subconscious that clamped muscles tight, held nerves in check and shackled him to the warring world.

WHEN Price woke and shucked out of the blankets Gefski had tucked around him, Cassidy was hunched over a small fire built under the prow of the burned-out tank. The aroma of coffee mingled with the pungent smoke.

"No tea, I suppose," the Englishman muttered, and rubbed snow under his eyes and down his cheeks. "Where are we?"

"Right where we were. Where did you expect to be?" Cassidy snarled, and peered cautiously over the treads toward the entrance of the sunken road. "I'm getting leary. We could be the only guys left in this country."

"Rearguards are always like this," Price said, and tugged at his bonnet before checking his Bren gun. "We can be here for days."

Cassidy straightened up to ease the load of dread in his belly. "You fought hundreds of these actions, I suppose. How long you Limeys been in Korea, anyhow?" he challenged.

"Sometime in September, I think. Only two battalions, as far as I know. The Argylls, and a Middlesex mob."

Cassidy sniffed and stared at the smudged fire. "What's the saying? 'Too few, and not enough'—something like that. Churchill said it, eh?"

"Don't know. Never met him." Price retorted, and looked up at Gefski's feet protruding over the edge of the embankment.

"Where'd you guys fight a rearguard action before?" Cassidy argued and spooned some sloppy mixture into the Englishman's dixie. "We been doin' good until lately."

"We had a spot of it in Malaya before we came up here." Price wiped his knife on the seat of his battle bags.

"Who was you fighting down there?"

"I don't rightly know. Same crowd, I suppose. Whoever they were, they were bloody good."

"They been pushing you jokers around plenty, eh?" Cassidy said, and squatted against the tank and began to eat. "Like at Dunkirk."

"Bloody rough at Dunkirk," the Englishman said, and sniffed dubiously at the chow.

"I seen it all, in the news-reels."

"Ah, but they were the chaps who got off. I was with the others. A few of us Argylls were in the rearguard action outside the town."

Cassidy lowered his chow can and peered under his helmet brim. "Cripes, you can't be that old. That was back in 1940, wasn't it?"

"I was eighteen then," Price explained. "We held a roadblock for four days. . . . What is this stuff?"

"Some of the bully beef you had in that small bag. Boiled it with crackers and soup powder."

The Englishman gasped. "You opened my iron rations?" He stared at the cotton bag in the snow. "Struth, I'll cop jankers! Not supposed to touch that without specific orders."

"Okay, I'm giving the orders. One—two—three—eat!"

Price considered the flaked chevrons daubed on Cassidy's parka. "I suppose you'll do," he said, and meditated. "Funny, but this is the first time I've ever tasted emergency grub. Never had an order before."

"Four days at a roadblock in Dunkirk?"

"Officers all killed first night," Price explained, and wondered whether he could risk brewing the tea still in the bag.

"You get that ribbon you're wearing—at Dunkirk?" Cassidy said with no special interest. He just recalled seeing a dull red ribbon when Price pulled his mountain jacket off to shave the day before.

"As a matter of fact, I did. I found a way to the coast, and helped a few chaps crawl down a cliff, and we were picked up by a destroyer. We brought out every rifle, too."

"What sort of a medal?"

"Bronze," Price said and worried a chunk of bully beef.

"One of the cheap ones, eh? I once knew a guy who got the Silver Star."

"Mine was in the form of a cross. The Victoria—"

Cassidy never heard. He caught the anxious drumming of Gefski's feet. "Hey! What cooks?"

Price grabbed his Bren gun and the iron-rations bag. Cassidy clambered up the embankment and slid beside Gefski. The Englishman kicked snow into the fire, then darted to the other side of the road.

Beyond, across the gray-white landscape faint shadows were thrown by a spiked moon. A few stars glittered, and Gefski whispered: "Two-three men—maybe more. This time they come, eh?"

The shell-slashed trees held up their frantic arms and writhed in the

light wind that dragged a low hymn across the snow. Cassidy turned and tried to figure where Gefski was looking. The goods would have to come through the sunken road if they were coming this way at all. The frozen paddies on either side would swallow any transport like muskeg devouring a cart.

"Where, Gefski, where?"

The huddled Pfc. hunched his shoulders, and a grimace of frustration curdled his features. "Gefski no see now. Gefski helluva soldier. Make fine citizen, eh?" he muttered through his thick lips. "Me keep lookin'."

A warning click came from the other side of the embankment. That would be Price snapping his thumb-nail against the hollow ammo charger of his gun. Cassidy felt the muscles of his back constrict and drag on a pin driven into the base of his skull. The Englishman held up all fingers clear of his leather mitten.

Cassidy had hoped Gefski had been imagining gooks. He crept down, went over and stood on a projecting rock.

"What's your panic?" he growled.

"Looks like a patrol. Slipping through those trees."

Cassidy ran his tongue over his lips and gripped Price's forearm. "Maybe you're right," he conceded and watched the indistinct figures flit across a fold in the landscape. "We'll let 'em in and nail 'em down. I'll be on the tank."

"They're splitting up," the Lance Corporal whispered. "Putting points out on each side of the road. Bloody good soldiering, that."

Cassidy watched and said: "The guy on this side is yours; Gefski can take the other one. Hold your fire until the last minute. Take it from me when I let the guys in the road have it."

"Right you are," Price said, and made himself comfortable on the edge of the ridge. "God bless," he added.

THE Marine went back to Gefski. "It's a patrol," he explained, and nodded toward the shadowy company approaching the sunken road. "Now don't get buck fever. They're putting out points on both sides. You take care of your side."

Gefski shrugged and emitted a guttural oath.

"Take plenty of time," Cassidy warned. "We gotta get 'em all. Don't open up until I do. Get it?"

Gefski nodded excitedly and shoved his rifle forward. "Gefski shoot good," he muttered.

Cassidy slid back, crept to the top of the tank and carefully placed his automatic weapon on the top turret. He huddled there working his lips as



"Hey!" Gefski cried. "We got someone talking. Calling Ben Dog Mike."

though he was trying to lick the scabs off. A series of convulsive agonies responded to the reflex actions of nerves trying to adjust themselves. His mind reached back into the past, groping among broken and obscure memories while the tension of waiting became impatience, and it all conspired to make any movement an immense effort. He hunched his hips and glowed with the momentary relief of accomplishment; then a new dread enveloped him because of the unreality of it all, until the commonplace movement of men ahead restored some balance, and he caught himself issuing silent orders for them:

"Step on it, can't you? Expect us to squat here for hours?" But the

approaching figures remained the same size, shapeless, indistinct, their movements braked by cautious restraint.

Cassidy knew everything depended on the initial timing of his small command. The Englishman would react like clockwork—a galling reflection. He was a trained soldier and could be relied on, whereas Gefski, who was more acceptable because of his rank and uniform, might goof off and break up what Cassidy hoped was a close-knit organization.

A deafening explosion roared out from his right, and he ducked, expecting to see a massive chunk of the embankment leap to the skies. Instead there was an instant flash of

scarlet, a pencil flick against the night as Gefski's rifle spat a single bullet.

"Gefski!" Cassidy roared. "I told you to wait—"

Price's Bren spat off a short burst when Gefski's shot stiffened the oncoming patrol.

Cassidy was still half erect, glaring across at Gefski, when a hail of screaming lead raced through the uneven walls of the sunken road. Cassidy gasped when something wrenched him around and rolled him to the tread skirt. He tried to scramble back, remembering the job he had assigned himself, but there was no target to put his sights on. Fear took over, an implacable numbing fear, and only the instincts of the trapped animal survived in him. Price fired two more bursts, then darted across the road to where Gefski was wildly snapping off single shots.

"That'll be it," he said, and patted Gefski's shoulder. "They've hopped it."

"Why the hell did you open up so quick?" Cassidy raged. He rapped out the demand with the staccato insistence of a machine gun.

Shamefaced, Gefski sat on the edge of the ridge and then clapped his paws over his earflaps. "What's a George Washington say to Gefski?" he moaned. "One helluva soldier, eh?"

"You get your guy?" Cassidy snarled at Price.

"Oh, proper. Hard lines on Gefski, though. Still, I don't suppose he's ever shot at a man before."

Gefski slid slowly down the embankment and stood slumped under the tilted gun barrel. He was demoralized, the conflict and tumult of his mind having drained the last of the vitality from his knees. He pawed blindly at the broken tank treads and tried to steady himself. When he looked up, Cassidy was pulling a mitten off and something wet and dark was dripping through his open fingers.

"We got a first-aid kit down there?" He looked up and scowled when he saw Price had taken over and was maintaining watch from the top of the embankment.

GEFSKI dropped to his knees, crept to the pile of equipment and began ransacking through ammo cases, tin cans and folded blankets, snuffling and moaning. Price took a quick look, then reached inside the skirt of his mountain jacket and tore out a package sewn to the liner. He tossed it across to Cassidy, who began tearing away the seals.

"Thanks," Cassidy muttered. "But don't you have to have an order to use this too? Okay, Gefski. I'll make out."

While the Sergeant slit the seams of his jacket and shirt, Price squinted

into the patchwork of light and dark that was his front, and Gefski continued to fumble through the gear.

"Sergeant wounded—maybe die," he kept muttering his toneless lamentations. "Gefski helluva soldier." He got to his feet again and shuffled back to the tank.

"That's all right, Gefski," Cassidy glanced across at Price again and added: "Don't worry, pal. You just missed. You're doin' all right. Anybody can miss in this light."

Gefski crawled up the slots in the tank tread, sniffling and rubbing the back of his hand under his nose. His gaze was centered on the bloody puncture while Cassidy poured the antiseptic powder into the wound. Gefski tried to help with the roll of bandage, but together they tangled it, and the roll rippled across Cassidy's legs.

"Price, him good soldier," Gefski wailed, "but Price not citizen, eh?"

"He ain't in the right army," Cassidy said, and tried to re-roll the bandage. "We could use guys like him and you kinda wonder why we can't all be the same."

He capitulated and called Price. "Give a hand, bud. I ain't so good at this stuff. Gefski, you get up there. Anything you see move, you shoot! Get it?"

"You stopped a juicy one—nice and clean," the Lance Corporal said while he wrapped Cassidy's arm. "Beginning to stiffen up now, eh?"

"Sure—lucky, I guess. What do we do now, Price?"

"We might move back fifty or sixty yards and dig in. They'll concentrate on the tank if they come back."

"I mean—I was wondering about getting out, all the way."

Price looked puzzled and sat back on his heels. "You'd have a bloody fine time explaining that to your Marine Captain, wouldn't you?"

"We can't hold on here, once those gooks hit in force. What did you do at Dunkirk? I mean—"

Price tucked the end of the bandage in expertly, then fastened Cassidy's slit jacket down with a length of adhesive tape. "We just hung on, withdrew when it got too hot and did the best we could until they shoved us over the cliff. That's rearguard action."

"I know, but how many did you have?"

"I don't remember now," Price said, and took a cautious look at Gefski, "but there were only four or five of us at the finish."

"There's only two of us now. Gefski's no soldier," Cassidy whispered.

"I did exactly the same thing the first night at Dunkirk," Price said dispassionately. "There was some talk about shooting me."

Cassidy winced, and turned to look down the sunken road. "Where the hell are the others?" he complained in an uneven voice. "How long do they want us to hole in here?"

"Then you suggest we move back a bit?" Price asked, and tried to make a sling for Cassidy's arm.

The Marine sergeant snatched the arm away with an oath.

"Leave me alone. I'll make out. Get back to your post."

Price dropped to the road. Cassidy looked down at him, and all the fury of frustration whipped through him and came whistling through the bullet-hole in his arm.

"I'm not taking orders from those damn gooks. We're sticking it out—right here. Carlson says to hold this sunken road until relieved, an' that's what we're doing. I'm in charge here, Lance—an' anybody who starts out won't get far. I still got one good arm left. You go lookin' for any cliffs to slide over, an' you'll never fight another damn rearguard action. Them's orders."

"Right you are, Sergeant," Lance Corporal Price said, and took his Bren to the top of the embankment.

Cassidy watched Price crawl beside Gefski, and there followed a moment of perfect lucidity while he caught himself wondering how far he would have to walk to find a dressing station. The trapped tumult in his mind dispersed because his load of command had evolved a decision. He was certain he could rely on himself, and that eventually he would walk proudly into that dressing station.

He rolled over on his belly and checked his gun. His neck muscles were aflame with pain, and a cold

numbness in his arm reminded him he had been wounded. His left hand felt swollen and helpless, and he bathed his tongue with a gob of dirty snow scooped off the side of the turret.

There could be a lot of driveways to plow out around Burnt Cabins, he reflected. He remembered the rattle and scrape of the steel blade over the frozen earth, and then he remembered what Price had said about digging in farther back.

That guy Price was a good soldier with plenty of experience. Maybe—

He turned his head painfully against the torch of outraged muscles. "Gefski—Gefski," he called calmly. "Get off there and take a shovel. Go back a piece and dig three foxholes. We maybe can use them later on—like Price said."

Price never took his eyes from his front. Gefski scrambled over him and hurried to the pile of gear in the road. "Gefski good for digging," he muttered, and looked for an entrenching tool. "Gefski dig good!"

There was some clatter of equipment, and with a cry Gefski dropped to his knees. "Hey!" he cried. "We got someone talking. Calling Ben Dog Mike."

He came up with the walkie-talkie box held gingerly in his great hands. "Sonagun! We got talkin' here. What you say?"

Cassidy vaulted off the tank and grabbed the box. Slipping his hand under the leather strap, he pawed for the switch. Gefski tried to yank the antenna out still farther.

The Marine sergeant put his ear to the receiver disk and caught a voice chanting their emergency call letters. He flicked the switch: "Sergeant Cassidy here," he responded. "We're still holding this road."

He switched over to receiving again and listened.

"Yes sir. We just engaged a small patrol," he answered a query, hope gleaming in his eyes. "Drove them off . . . Good! We'll hold until relieved, sir . . . Nothing serious as yet. One slight wound. . . . We can walk out. Thank you, sir."

He shoved the box back into Gefski's arms and cuffed him across the ear. "They're coming up to relieve us!" he grinned. "Get this site policed up, Gefski. Looks like a damn grease pit."

Price said: "S'truth! They can't be more than a mile away if you picked them up on that."

"Ten-fifteen minutes at the most. They heard Gefski shooting, I guess." Cassidy smiled, and winked at the Pfc.

"Good old Gefski!" said Price, and turned to check his front again.

"Yeh," Cassidy mumbled, and threw Price a salute. "Good old Gefski."



That guy Lance Corporal Price was a good soldier, and maybe—

The Hour of



"If you come back, I'm going to kill you," Lanny yelled.

WHEN they got down off the rimrock and into Diamond, there was still sunlight to spare and no sign of the Miles City stage, so they put by the buggy and took chairs on the gallery of the Cattleman, Lanny sprawling out loose and gangly in store-bought clothes. Travis at first kept his eyes off his son, feeling now the choked-up finality of this hour of parting, and not wanting it to show; but he was thinking: *He'll be a man full-grown when he comes back, tasting in this a sense of loss. And also of fear.*

He said: "You be sure to write, son." He had said this before on the long ride from the hill ranch.

Lanny frowned; he had a thin sensitive face, not looking strong enough for so harsh a land. He said: "Town's too quiet."

Travis had noticed that; he had seen Diamond grow from a whisky barrel dumped beside a trail, and he knew its pulse. Any other day he'd have wondered about the quietness. "You get all you can out of your schooling," he said. "But do some frolicking, too. You need money, you write me."

"Sure," Lanny said and began spinning up a cigarette.

The scar on the back of his right hand showed; and Travis seeing it, knew then the nature of his own fear. It had been a fool notion, taking a

wolf whelp home for a pet, and when he'd dug out that den in search of the litter, he shouldn't have listened to Lanny's pleading. But that had been ten years ago, when Lanny was six.

Lanny peered along the street. "Crabtree's about the only fellow showing."

Travis scarcely heard him. He was thinking that Lanny had made a hand at this fall's roundup; and here Lanny was, smoking in front of him bold as brass; and he'd seen the boy pack a razor in the carpetbag which now rested at his feet. Was that maybe enough?

Lanny said: "Queer there's only one horse in front of the Palace. You reckon that would be Blount's?"

Parting

When a boy risks gunfire in taking responsibility for his own act, his father knows he has become a man.

by NORMAN FOX

Travis leaned forward, all his attention caught, and had a look along the boardwalk, along the row of false-fronts to the saloon. A heavy anger came up in him. "It is Blount's."

Crabtree came legging it fast along the empty walk until he stopped beneath the gallery, his town marshal's badge glittering and his old face stricken. He said to Travis: "By God, I'm glad to see you, George!"

Travis said: "So he's liquored up again."

"And roaring. He's run everybody to cover. Now he's in the Palace alone, working at his mad." An old man's impotence sharpened Crabtree's anger. "You said it wouldn't happen again, George."

"I talked to him that last time," Travis said. "He blubbered some, and allowed he was sorry. Asked me to bank his pay in Miles till the season was through. As long as he couldn't lay his hands on money, he was sure to behave."

Crabtree said: "Well, he raised the price somewhere."

"I gave it to him," Lanny said.

TRAVIS turned sharply, withholding his hand by strength of will, enough thought in him in this red moment to know that the parting mustn't be marred. But he was thinking that once it had been a wolf whelp, and even after the varmint had got big enough to be all teeth and bristle, Lanny had tried feeding it by hand and got that scar. Now it was Blount, and it had been Lanny who'd argued that they hire the drifter.

"He told me last night he needed the price of a new pair of boots," Lanny said. "Claimed there was no use asking you."

Travis said stonily: "You know he goes kil-crazy with a skinful."

Crabtree said: "He's got to be got out of there."

Travis stood and gave his belt a hitch. "I'll go after him."

Lanny stood up. "He doesn't cotton much to you, even when he's sober. I'm the only one can do anything with him."

Travis felt his anger twist into fear. "This is no job for you, son."

"I gave him the money," Lanny said, and started down the steps.

Travis looked at him. They were strangers, and he couldn't reach out

to Lanny. Travis said: "Give him your gun, Crabtree."

"I don't want a gun," Lanny said, and went on toward the Palace.

Crabtree said, "Blount thinks a heap of him," not sounding very sure.

Travis still stood watching, held motionless. Then he brushed past Crabtree and started pacing after Lanny, and the sky was never so big above and the town never so dreary, and in him was emptiness and a horror too great to face. He came past the mercantile and the blacksmith shop and the printer's, seeing faces at the windows and men in the doorways, and he knew what kept them there, remembering the last time Blount had treed the town. The townsmen were apart from all this, waiting it out. He felt akin to them, yet alone, terribly alone; and he supposed that to every man there came one such moment. He had walked with Lanny all of Lanny's days till now.

Lanny had stopped at the foot of the steps leading up to the Palace porch, and he heard Lanny cry: "Blount! Come out of there!"

Travis lunged to the middle of the street and stood in its dust, wishing now that he'd fetched Crabtree's gun. Across the distance Lanny looked slight. He heard Lanny call again, and he thought: *I should be doing this for him!* He saw Blount part the batwings and stand unsteadily, a blocky, unshaven man, senseless of eye; and the biggest thing under all the bright sky was the gun in Blount's hand.

Lanny said: "Pile on your horse and ride out, Blount. Don't come back."

Blount teetered on his heels, spreading his arms in a great, stunned gesture, and then he began to laugh; his laughter grew, and he raised the gun and pointed it at Lanny. The gun wavered, but that was only because whisky ruled Blount's hand; in Travis a shout built up that couldn't find its way out.

Lanny's voice piped, not quite a man's voice: "It's me—Lanny. This is Lanny talking, Blount. You put down that gun!"

The gun beat back against Blount's hand, the smoke billowing and the noise great, but when Travis looked, Lanny was still standing. At the

hitchrail, Blount's horse reared, not hit but boogered. Blount had ceased his laughing; he looked down at the gun, and then dropped it. He said, "Lanny—" and a crying jag hit him; he began blubbering, making silly, wild sounds. He came down off the porch and staggered toward Lanny, reaching out for him. Lanny shoved at Blount. "Get on that horse! If you come back, I'm going to kill you," he yelled.

Blount moved to the horse and made an awkward mount, almost falling from the saddle as he tugged at the tie-rope. He wheeled the horse about and rode away at a ragged gallop. Travis freed himself from his own roots and came toward Lanny. "You hurt?"

"He only dusted my clothes," Lanny said.

Travis' relief was like the great wave washing over him when he tumbled into his bunk after long riding, but his anger was headier than that he'd known on the Cattleman's gallery. "You utter fool!" he said. "To stand there and let him shoot at you!"

Lanny shrugged. "I gambled he was drunk enough to miss. And that the shot would sober him some. What else was there to do?"

Travis looked at him across all the years, remembering Lanny standing with his hand dripping and his eyes sick, while Travis had put a bullet into that wolf whelp. But this time Lanny had finished up his own chore.

Lanny looked up the street toward the Cattleman, and beyond to the town's far outskirts where dust lifted along the stage road. "I've got to leg it," he said.

It hit Travis again that this was the hour of parting, the thought taking the last of his anger out of him. When a boy got big enough to accept the responsibility for his own acts, he ceased to be son to his father; forever after, they were man and man. There was a sadness in this knowledge, and a swelling pride, and the end of fear. You walked so far together, and then you watched while the other walked alone.

Lanny started running toward the oncoming stage, and Travis lifted his hand and let it fall. "So long, son!" he said.



THE YELLOW RIVER

FOR four days they followed down the main currents of the Yellow River. There were three steam launches lined around the gunwales with sandbags. In the hot part of the day the Anhwei troops stripped down to their short pants and squatted stupidly on their heels, or they moved the positions of their machine guns around to keep the metal cool under the shifting patches of shade from the awnings. Sometimes they talked about the Japanese, and whether they would really surrender as their Emperor had ordered. Sometimes they talked about the Communists, and whether there would be fighting again with them. But mostly it was too hot to talk, and the river was in flood so that the banks to the north and to the south were so far away as to be almost out of sight. The Communist river posts were out of small-arms range, and there was no way to know what would happen until the river narrowed.

The American Colonel Scott stayed on the leading launch with General Chukuo and his Eurasian wife. This woman's name was Hara, and she remembered Scott from 1929, when he had been a military language student in Peking; but Scott did not remember much about her, and he was tired of reminiscing. And he was tired of arguing with the General about the Communists. The General would always say: "We have been fighting them since 1925. I myself fought them in Kiangsi. I tell you, they are backed by the Russians. I tell

you—" So forth and so forth. Scott had served three tours in Peking as an attaché, and he thought he knew something. His mission was to "expedite the Japanese surrender." He told the General in plain words that he was here for this purpose and not to fool with the Communists.

"Ostrich!" the General would say, coughing hard.

Hara would say brightly, "You are both crazy. The war is over." Both of them would look at her disgustedly. "Ostriches, ostriches," the General would say. But General Chukuo was dying of tuberculosis, and Scott thought he was somewhat of an ostrich himself.

On the fourth day the river narrowed, and the gathering waters began to pick up speed. On the fifth day in the morning they could see in the haze ahead where the water flowed between the Brass Mountain and the Rain Mountain.

"Now we will see," said General Chukuo. "The Communists hold this place, and they have artillery."

In an hour they were close enough to use field glasses. Scott said: "I make it to be three or four thousand yards across."

"Their cordite is no good," said Chukuo, "We can make it, if they do not use the artillery."

"Why shouldn't they use the artillery?"

Chukuo shrugged. He was a very little man, and though he stood straight and seemed strong and supple, there was a tiredness that showed in

his face. He said: "Possibly they do not want to start anything now. We will test them out."

"As you say," said Scott. After a moment he said: "I still think you are a damn fool to go through without your army."

"I do not want to start anything, either," said Chukuo. "It is good enough to have a garrison in Shokuan. If we can get to Shokuan, we will be near the Japanese outposts. It will be quicker if we can negotiate."

"If they are negotiating with anyone, it is with the Communists," said Scott.

"We will see," said Chukuo. "Now we must get the boats dispersed and get in the center of the river." He snapped out some orders in Chinese. Around them the soldiers on the deck began to stir. They got themselves into positions behind the sandbags where they could poke their rifles out, but they did not seem to be very interested. Most of them fell into a sullen silence. Chukuo went back behind the boilers where he could shoot at the other boats.

MADAM CHUKUO remained sitting where she had been all day, on a pile of luggage high above the parapet. She smiled at Scott. She said: "Now we can really talk."

"Talk, hell!" said Scott. "You'd better get down, Hara."

There was a pout on her smooth round face. She said: "I've been bursting to talk to you. Ever since you came on board."



ONE WAR ENDS IN THIS STORY; BUT
IS PEACE IN SIGHT?

FLAWS ON

by
MacARTHUR CARMAN

"What about?" said Scott. "About Peking?" He raised his glasses and tried again to study the Rain Mountain.

Hara said: "You were awfully handsome then."

Scott sighed. "Anybody can be handsome," he said, "when he is twenty-five and wears a blue dress uniform."

"You were handsome without that," she said.

He looked at her. She was staring down into the water at the side of the boat. The boat swung a little in its course, and a patch of sunlight escaping past the awning slipped across her breasts, and then because of the slow rocking of the boat, moved up and down the tight silk of her dress between her waist and throat.

"I can see you are still in good shape," said Scott. "Now get down on the deck."

She got down, and presently General Chukuo came back. He was coughing very badly from the exertion of climbing, and from the shouting. There was no talking on the launch and they plowed on through the drifting water that was so thick with mud and silt it looked as if you could walk on it. When they were directly in the gap between the two mountains, the trapped heat of the day beat down and seemed to compress them against the surface of the water, and behind them from each side of the boat there were two bending trails of shimmering air where the heat went out over the water from the boilers. The engines

themselves chugged with bad clanking noises.

"They are not going to fire," said Scott. "They are going to let us through."

"Look at that," said Chukuo.

In his glasses now Scott could see the aligned plumes struck up from the water by machine-gun fire that could not reach them. In a moment they could hear the rattle of the firing from the direction of the Rain Mountain.

They went on for five minutes. They were almost through the gap.

"What is the matter with the artillery?" said Chukuo. "I can see the emplacements."

THE Brass Mountain was a large hogback. It was bare of everything except gorse bushes near the bottom, and boulders; but higher up, Scott could plainly see the parallel scars of trenches that followed around the bulge of the main ridge. The Rain Mountain also had trenches, but low down near the water there were other scars.

"Down near the water?" said Scott. "Yes," said Chukuo. "You can't see the guns, though."

"Naturally."

"There!" said Chukuo. "Listen!" There was the noise of a hollow pop from the direction of the Rain Mountain. After a long interval there was a flash on the water far short of them.

"A mortar," said Scott. "They can't hit us with that."

There were six more mortar shells and some machine-gunning. After

ten minutes the river began to widen out ahead of them.

After half an hour they were sure they were through. Madam Chukuo stood up and said: "Hooray!"

"There is something wrong with it," said Scott.

Chukuo said: "I think there is something wrong too."

"They fired everything they had," said Scott.

"The big guns are gone," said Chukuo. "That could only mean one thing: They are going to use them somewhere else. Probably against Shokuan."

Madam Chukuo was sitting back comfortably in her usual place, smoking a cigarette. "Darling," she said, "you are such a pessimist."

Chukuo was still coughing a little. He said: "What have I got to be happy about?"

"Oh," she said, "the war is over. The Japanese are going to surrender. The Reds are not going to fight us. Look at it that way."

"We'll see when we get to Shokuan," said Chukuo.

She said: "Colonel Scott, tell us your opinion."

"My opinion is not an optimistic one," said Scott; "it is better to leave it unexpressed."

"What is it?" she said.

"We'll see when we get to Shokuan," said Scott. . . .

Late in the afternoon they changed course and angled toward the south bank. For a long time there was no place where the shore was distinct,



"I can see you are still in good shape," said Scott. "Now

since even where the water ended, there were broad stretches of mud-flats and marshes. In some places the fields of rushes went back a mile or so before the ground began to rise. In time they came to some low hills, and General Chukuo stood up.

"Shokuan," he said, pointing ahead. From behind the hills now appeared a long low ridge that projected out into the water. It was the high ground between two minor rivers that met where they flowed into the mainstream. All along the ridge on the near side Scott could see the ancient winding wall of the city. The high floodwaters lapped at its base and kept the peninsula isolated from the main

shore upstream, and also on the downstream side.

"The only way they can attack is from the landward side," said Chukuo.

"Well, somebody is doing it," said Scott. He was listening carefully. Now across the water he could hear a faint din of small-arms fire. Sometimes there were explosions that might have been grenades or the fire of mortars.

"I don't hear any firing from the shore downstream," said Chukuo.

"Only upstream," said Scott.

"Then it must be the Communists. The shore downstream is held by the Japanese. We can get in from that side."

They swung far out on the river in a long arc that carried them around the peninsula and back again under the city wall across from the Japanese shore. They were not fired upon. They landed at a dock which had long ago been assembled from blocks of stone fallen outward from the wall. The garrison commander was waiting for them, and spoke briefly to General Chukuo.

"It is the Communists, all right," said Chukuo. "They have been fighting for two days."

"How about the Japs?" said Scott. "There is a Japanese officer waiting at the Citadel. He was sent from the staff of General Tuzuki."



get down on the deck."

"To discuss the surrender?"

"I have a feeling it will depend on holding Shokuan," said Chukuo. "We will have to talk to him."

The shops and stalls along the narrow streets were thronged with grim-faced civilians. There was sometimes cheering when they saw the golden plaque of Chukuo's rank on his collar, or when they saw Scott coming in his American uniform. But all the way along when they had passed, a silence fell behind. The Citadel was a square stone fort, set in the center of a flat area cleared of houses for several hundred yards around. It was already nightfall when they arrived. Hara was taken off to her rooms in a

building with a graceful flaring red roof, and Scott went with Chukuo to a staff room in a building on the other side of the well-kept garden. The room was furnished only with round wooden tables and chairs, and was very dimly lighted by oil lamps.

Chukuo was by now breathing very hard from the walk, and as soon as he was seated, he was seized with a paroxysm of coughing. He said when he was able: "They are going to bring in the Japanese officer. You talk to him. I don't think I can talk."

After a long time a staff officer put his head through the blue curtain of the doorway and said something, but Chukuo drove him out again with sharp words.

He said to Scott: "The Jap is afraid of the American officer. He has heard bad stories."

"Good," said Scott.

AT that moment the curtain was pushed aside and the Japanese officer came in, accompanied by a Japanese sergeant. The officer was slim and young and looked very strong. He wore a cocky little forage cap and boots and riding-breeches, and a light jacket with the open collar of his white shirt turned back neatly over the lapels. His long sword he held stiffly at his side, but he kept his right hand tucked into the side pocket of his jacket. He bowed stiffly to General Chukuo and then to Scott.

"You will talk to the American officer, and you will talk in English," said Chukuo. "You speak English?"

"Very good English," said the Japanese. "Thank you."

"What's the matter with your hand?" said Scott.

"I am sorry. I am sick inside," said the Japanese. But he did not take his hand out of his pocket.

"Too bad," said Scott. He moved his own hand over and loosened the holster on his forty-five. The Japanese stiffened, but made no move.

"You come from the staff of General Tuzuki?" said Scott.

"Yes, thank you," said the Jap. "But now I must go back."

"Why? Didn't you have a message?"

"No message now. The situation is different." He inclined his head to the side. He meant the Communists, the firing in the distance—though the noise of it seemed to have died down a little.

"General Tuzuki is not going to surrender to the Kuomintang troops," said Scott, "just because the Communists are attacking us?"

"How can he surrender if you cannot get your troops through?"

"We'll get them through," said Scott. "You go tell him that."

"I do not think he will be interested," said the Jap.

Scott turned to Chukuo. "I don't think we'll get very far with this dope," he said; "we'd better go and talk to Tuzuki."

"We can go on the river," said Chukuo, between coughs. "We will have to go in the morning. You can't navigate on that river in the night-time."

"All right," said Scott. He sat for a moment thinking. He said: "How about your wife?"

"I'll send her back," said Chukuo. "I should not have brought her."

"All right," said Scott. Then he said: "Let's take this dope with us." He turned to the Japanese officer and said, "Listen, dope, you go get some sleep. We'll go see General Tuzuki in the morning."

The Japanese officer's face was very tight, and his eyes were closed to slits. He said: "Thank you. We can go in my boat. It is very fast."

"How long will it take?"

"Three hours. Maybe four hours."

"Good," said Scott. "We'll go in your boat. Is it clean?"

"Very clean," said the Jap. "Very, very clean."

"All right," said Scott. "That's all, dope."

General Chukuo waved his hand, and the Japanese bowed and left.

They sat for a long time with the lamps burning low. Chukuo spread out a map on a table and made a plan for the advance of his army to Shokuan. "If there is not too much resistance they can get here by tomorrow night," he said, "but there is not much ammunition left."

After this was done the orders were sent to the radio section for transmission, and then there was not much else. The firing outside the city was now only sporadic.

Scott said: "Why don't you go to sleep?"

"No," said Chukuo. "This is my army."

"You'll kill yourself."

"No," said Chukuo. "I have two years left. I have excellent medical opinion."

Later the orderlies brought in some soup and rice. After they had eaten, Chukuo said: "There is something I want to ask you."

"All right," said Scott.

"You knew Hara a long time ago."

"Yes."

"You were very close?"

"Yes," said Scott.

"If anything should happen to me, will you look out for her?"

"Of course."

"Good," said Chukuo. "Now I hope you will get some sleep yourself."

SCOTT lay down on one of the hard benches and slept. But not very soundly. He was awakened now and then by the noises of officers coming

in to report. And about midnight there came a long shrill whistle and an explosion somewhere in the city.

"There's the artillery," said Chukuo. "I knew we were right."

They listened, and there were several more shells, but always they came over singly and at great intervals.

"They are only ranging in," said Scott. "They won't do anything until morning." He rolled over, and after that he slept very soundly. . . .

He did not know what it was that awakened him. He sat up with the feeling that something had happened, but he could not remember. General Chukuo had been sleeping with his head cradled in his arms on the table, but he too was awake now with his head raised, listening. The windows were open but there was no sound, not even a stirring of the cold air. It was still dark, but there was now an almost imperceptible luminescence in the sky so that he could see the outlines of roofs and part of the crenellation of the wall of the citadel, and the lamps were out so that the faint gleam of the map on the table was the only spot of lightness in the room. A cricket somewhere began a monotonous buzzing; but suddenly he was interrupted by the growing screech of a shell coming over. While it was still traveling there was another and then another; there were three of them in the air at once and after the first one landed somewhere out on the edge of the city, they counted the spaced explosions. There were five: A five-gun battery.

There was no need at that moment to say anything. They both got up and pulled their uniforms together. A staff officer burst into the room and while he was chattering at General Chukuo there was another salvo, this time four guns: A four-gun battery or perhaps the five-gun battery with one gun not firing. It was hard to tell.

"Looks like the big attack," said Scott.

"The attack has already happened," said Chukuo.

"Oh?"

"They took the Chin Gate. That was ten minutes ago. They did it with bayonets, without firing. Now they are using the artillery."

He was moving toward the door.

"Where are you going?" said Scott. Chukuo stopped. "Oh," he said.

"Someone has to go to General Tuzuki. You go. I have to stay here."

"If there is a fight, I'll stay here."

"This is a small thing. It is more important for you to talk to General Tuzuki."

"I suppose so."

"It is more important for me to see that my army gets here."

"Sure," said Scott. "How did they come with their attack?"

Chukuo waved at a stack of papers on the table. "They did not attack," he said. "They will attack this morning."

"Oh," said Scott. He thought for a moment. Chukuo pushed the curtain aside and went out. He put his head back inside and said: "Put Hara on one of the boats. Send her back. Will you do that for me?"

"Right," said Scott. Then he said, "Good luck."

"Good luck," said Chukuo, and dropped the curtain behind him.

Scott went out immediately and found the Japanese officer standing in the garden with his sergeant, looking up at the sky. As soon as Scott had told him what to do, they went on to find Hara. They discovered her rooms quickly. The maid did not have anything packed, but Hara was dressed.

"Beautiful day for a battle," she said. She smiled, but it seemed to be an effort.

"Come on," said Scott. "We're evacuating." He took her hand and started for the door, but she held back.

"Come on," said Scott.

She pulled her hand away and beckoned to her maid. The maid found a cigarette and gave it to her.

"I'm not going anywhere," she said.

"Would you light my cigarette?" She held it gracefully to her lips.

Scott said: "Don't be a damned heroine."

She only looked at him and held the cigarette. He scratched his head, and she smiled at him. Then he took the cigarette out of her hand and slapped her hard across the cheek. She doubled over with the surprise of it and hid her face in her hands. He dragged her toward the door. Hara was sobbing when they got out into the hall, and Scott stopped for a moment to let her pull herself together.

"I'm not afraid," she said.

"I know that. Don't talk about it."

"He isn't well," she said. "If he isn't killed, he'll kill himself."

"There isn't time to talk," said Scott.

"Let's go."

They went outside. Some soldiers were setting up machine guns in the gate-house, and the gate itself was closed, but they were let out through a small wooden door in the gate.

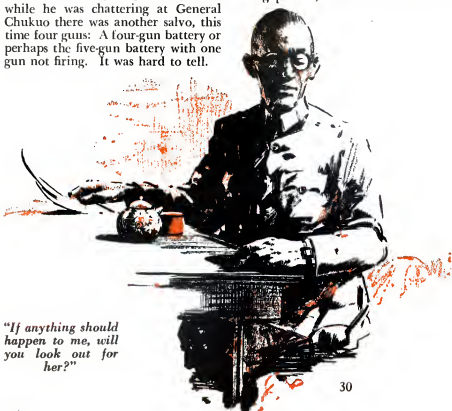
On the parade, the cleared space around the citadel, there were several companies of soldiers drawn up. They stood in ragged lines, leaning on their rifles or squatting on their heels, waiting. Against the wall of the citadel was an unorganized crowd of soldiers; their rifles were in a heap on the ground and around this group was flung a thin line of guards. There were two machine guns set up at a good firing distance, pointing at them. The colonel in command of the troops stopped Scott and through Hara said, "We are having many deserters. Please be careful if you are going into the town."

"What is he going to do with them?" said Scott.

The Colonel said something brief and curt. He pointed in the direction of the Chin Gate. There was a tall column of thick smoke going up from fires, and the top of it was catching the early sunlight. The firing was now very heavy, but it was muffled, at a great distance. From different directions close by in the city though, there were occasional isolated rifle shots.

Hara translated. "He says if the situation gets worse he will shoot them. If the situation gets better he will send them back into the fight."

The Japanese officer said, "It ought to be the other way around. That is not the way to treat deserters."



"If anything should happen to me, will you look out for her?"

There was sometimes cheering when they saw the golden plaque of Chukuo's rank on his collar, or when they saw Scott coming in his American uniform. But all the way along when they had passed a silence fell behind.



The Colonel said something else.
Hara said: "He says they have been taking the boats."

"Who?"

"The deserters."

"What boats?" said Scott.

"He doesn't know what boats. This is just something he heard."

"They better not taken my boat," said the Japanese officer. Nobody paid any attention to him, and Scott started across the parade toward the houses. Hara kept beside him, and as they walked, Scott took his .32 out from the holster beneath his shirt and

gave it to her. "You know how to use it?" he said.

She said: "I am crack shot."

Before they had gone very far they heard firing from back at the citadel. They stopped for a moment, but the Japanese officer said, "It is only the deserters," and they went on.

The sun was high enough that it struck them horizontally in the eyes along certain stretches of the street and they had to go carefully. The houses and shops were all boarded up and there were no civilians in the streets. Coming around one angle of

the street, Scott almost walked into a group of soldiers who were standing there. They had been smoking and talking. They jumped and brought their rifles to the guard.

Scott looked for the officer and saw that he wore the rectangular white patch of the Military Police. Scott said in Chinese, "We are going to the landing place."

The officer stared narrowly at them for a long time. Then he smiled. "I will take you," he said.

Hara said, as they walked, "Are you really going on with that Jap?"



"Sure," said Scott. "If his boat is still here."

"I wish you wouldn't."

"I can handle him," said Scott.

She said, "I wouldn't count on it. He's one of those fanatics. I've seen lots and lots like him."

"Old wives' tale," said Scott, and Hara did not say anything more.

At the docks there were no boats. There were five soldiers sitting on the edge of the stone, looking very downcast. The M.P. officer put them under arrest. He made them stand against the wall without their rifles, but they did not seem to care what happened to them. The Japanese officer said: "I had a boat here." He was looking

across the water, and he seemed to be flabbergasted.

He said: "I had two soldiers guarding it. Very smart men. How could this have happened?"

"Maybe they were smart enough to get away," said Scott.

"Surely not," said the Jap. "They would die first."

ONE of the deserters pointed over the water to the Japanese side and muttered sullenly. Hara said, "The Japanese boat went across to the village."

"Of course," said the Jap. "They are very smart. They will come back when I call them." He wrestled

around for a moment with something inside his shirt, and presently drew forth a cloth which he had wrapped around his waist next to the skin. It was a Japanese flag with many characters inscribed on the white field. "It has saved my life more than once," he said. "Now watch." He climbed up as high as he could get on the wall and began to wave his flag. He waved for a long time, but nothing happened.

"Wait a minute," said Scott. He took a rifle and some cartridges from the pile where the deserters had dropped them, and he fired five rounds into the air. He said to the Jap, "Now wave."



Scott watched with his field glasses. There were some faint claps of answering shots from across the water, and not long after that the shape of a small motorboat cut out from among the fishing-boats. When it had gotten out some distance they could see it was a fast boat, a speedboat, and it reared up on the crest of the white swath it cut in the water.

They all sat down and watched it come across the water. The firing from the direction of the Chin Gate had died out, and now it was a quiet morning with the warm sun on the glittering gray stones of the dock, and the water was sparkling as far as you could see.

"I wonder how the battle is coming," said Hara.

"I doubt if we'll know till we see Tuzuki," said Scott.

"I'm to go with you, then?"

"What else?"

"Good," she said. She was sitting very close to him, and he could smell some sort of very delicate perfume coming up from her skin where it was warm under the sun. He thought he ought to move away, but he didn't.

Now to Scott everything began to feel different. In the ten minutes it took the boat to cross the bay, it seemed that the whole situation had settled itself into a jam that would sooner or later fall to pieces, but not

"They took the Chin Gate minutes ago with bayonets, without firing."

too soon. All his decisions had been made, and now there did not seem to be any use in pondering whether they had been the right ones or not. He began to feel drowsy, and by the time they had loaded in the boat and cleared the promontory, he was almost asleep. The river when they were out in the center of it became monotonous; the banks were so far away that they seemed to be moving very slowly, though the rapid slapping of the waves against the bottom and the deafening roar of the engine would have told him they were making perhaps ten or fifteen miles an hour. He really did not notice the passage of time and was startled when he looked at his watch and saw that it was eleven o'clock in the morning. They had been traveling for nearly four hours.

He roused himself and looked around. The Jap officer was sitting very straight on the bench seat ahead of them, beside the sergeant and the operator of the boat. Hara was asleep beside Scott, and in the rear sat the two soldiers who were half asleep. Scott leaned forward and tapped the officer on the shoulder, and when he turned, asked, "How much farther?"

The officer looked at him very coldly. "I surprise you," he said. "No farther at all."

Hara sat up. She said: "He's crazy. It's another hour yet. I know this part of the river."

"What do you mean by that?" said Scott to the officer. "What do you mean—no farther?"

"I show you when we get around the bend," said the officer, and turned around.

Scott tapped him again. "I suppose you have posts along the river," he said.

"Yes," said the officer, turning half around.

"They have radio communication with Army Headquarters?"

"Of course."

"Don't you think it would be good to stop and have them send a message? We'll save time when we get there."

"No," said the officer.

"Why not?"

"No!" said the officer. "That's all—no!"

Scott was puzzled because this did not seem right. He thought for a moment and decided to go carefully. He said, "I suppose you are an aide to General Tuzuki?"

"Yes," said the officer, "he is a distant relative."

"What kind of a man is he?"

"He is a fool," said the officer curtly.

"How?"

"He listens to bad opinions," said the officer.

"In other words, he does not listen to your opinion?"

"No."

"Would you mind telling me your opinion?"

"No," said the officer, "I would not mind telling you now." He turned full face to Scott and raised himself a little on his seat so that he was staring down his nose, and there was a fixed smile on his face. He said, "In my opinion the Japanese Army has not been defeated in battle and there can be no surrender."

"Your Emperor has ordered it."

"He listened to bad opinions."

"I see," said Scott. "Does General Tuzuki believe this?"

The officer considered this question. He said, "It does not matter if I tell you this. I think it is a question of fact. I think it depends on whether the Kuomintang Army can get through. He is an opportunist."

"Then probably nothing I could say to him would make any difference?"

"How do I know? Anyway, I think it is better if you do not see him."

"You think so, eh?"

"Yes," said the officer.

"You have pretty good opinions for a lieutenant. You are a lieutenant, aren't you?"

"Yes," said the officer. He was fumbling with something behind the back of the seat. "It is not a question of rank," he said. He brought his arm up, and his hand was his pistol. Its blunt muzzle was very close to Scott's nose. The Jap said: "Now I will prove it to you." He reached with his other hand across the back of the seat and unbuckled the holster at Scott's waist and jerked out the forty-five. The Japanese sergeant had turned and was watching with interest. In the rear seat the two soldiers had stirred and probably were sitting up.

The lieutenant from where he was sitting could not reach across as far as Hara. He said to her: "Now please give me the small pistol. The one he gave you this morning."

Hara was very good about it. She reached into the jacket she was wearing and took out the .32. She did not tremble nor jerk her hand as she fired; it was a smooth movement: there was only a loud pop, and then there was a hole in the forehead of the Japanese officer. His own gun jerked and banged at that instant, and the impact of the slug flung Hara back against the bulwark of the boat. It looked to Scott as if she had been hit in the shoulder or the chest, but then suddenly the deck came up to meet his face. Something was crashing against

the back of his head. It was a rifle-butt. He felt three blows before he passed out. . . .

When Scott awoke there was a shaft of sunlight on the wall above his head. He was in a white bed in a bare room. The sunlight came through a skylight of clear glass in the ceiling; and it came down at a steep angle so that he knew it was either late morning or early afternoon, but he did not know what day it might be. His head was swathed in bandages and when he turned it on the hard pillow there was a great pain inside that made him stop. But after a moment he turned all the way and looked around the room.

In the center of the room was a small round table and several chairs. He was having difficulty in focusing his eyes but he could see that there was someone sitting on one of the chairs beside the door. It seemed to be a man in uniform. It was a Chinese uniform. In a few moments there was a bustle and the sound of feet on the floor, going softly. There were a lot of people coming into the room. One of them was General Chukuo who coughed several times and was not looking very happy. There were several Japanese with swords. Someone pulled up a chair for General Chukuo beside the bed, and then beside this chair there was placed another in which a small Japanese officer sat. He

was an old man with glasses, but he looked very soldierly.

"This is General Tuzuki," said Chukuo. "We have come to see you."

"I hope you are feeling fine," said the old man. "I hope you will be able to participate in the ceremony. It will be good to have an American officer. I was educated in your country, you know."

"I feel fine," said Scott.

"Cornell," said Tuzuki. "And I took my Master's degree there too. I came to like your country very much. I have always thought it was a great shame, the war. It's very nice that it is over."

"How is Hara?" said Scott.

General Chukuo was sitting and looking down at his hands. General Tuzuki said: "I shall have to apologize for what has happened. That officer was my nephew, you know. He was too nationalistic. He did not know when to stop."

"I see," said Scott. "Is she dead, or what?"

"Dead," said Chukuo.

There was nothing said by anyone for a long moment. Scott asked: "How did you make out at Shokuan?"

"All right," said Chukuo.

"Oh, that was quite a battle," said Tuzuki. "That was a masterpiece. The Communists are really going to have something to fear from this commander." He smiled in the direction of Chukuo. Chukuo coughed. Tuzuki coughed politely and said, "I have made a tactical analysis. It was really very good. The resistance at Shokuan diverted most of the Communist troops and the main force of your army got through very easily."

"They had us shut up in the citadel," said Chukuo; "there was nothing else to do."

"Oh, I think you are too modest," said Tuzuki. He turned to Scott. "With generals like this one, they are going to clean the Reds out of their country in a very short time. I will bet you this."

"Two years," said Chukuo wearily. "It is going to take two years." The effort of speaking sent him into a coughing spell. Scott reached out and put his hand on Chukuo's arm. "How do you feel, old man?" he said. "You'd better come over to Arizona and have a rest."

"No," said General Chukuo. "It is going to take two years." He stood up and said, "Will you excuse me now? I will come and see you when you feel better." He turned and walked out of the room.

General Tuzuki laughed a small laugh. "He is a sick man now," he said, "it is not going to take as long as he thinks."

"No," said Scott. "It won't take long."



"It has saved my life more than once," he said. "Now watch."

The Science of Secret Writing

Clandestine communication is an ancient art, which modern wars and recent discoveries have developed into a science. Many readers will recall our own experience with it, when a copy of the January, 1917, BLUE BOOK was used as the vehicle for a cipher and "invisible"-ink message by German saboteurs.

by CHARLES NELSON BARNARD



*In his flight to England, he disappeared.
He has never been found.*

ON December 5th, 1941, Japanese Admiral Nagamo, commanding a task force 250 miles north of Pearl Harbor, received instructions from Tokyo to "Climb Mt. Sitka." American radio intercept stations on Oahu also heard the message, little knowing that it was the green light for the attack which was to come in forty-eight hours.

"A Son is Born." With these four cryptic words, the meaning of which was not known even to those who heard them transmitted across Europe's airways, Germany plunged the world into war in 1914.

"Manhattan District Project." These were three words which were seen by thousands of eyes, but whose terrible import was not known for several years until their secret was

shattered in the morning sky over Hiroshima on August 6, 1945.

By the use of such phrases, or secret writing, man keeps his most cherished and most valuable secrets. To the mysteries and complexities of cryptography he has often trusted his own life and the future of millions.

The science of cryptography has for centuries been one of the most forbidding yet fascinating fields of literate human interest; a challenge to man's ingenuity which has occupied some of the world's most brilliant minds and which has produced a history as exciting as the best detective fiction.

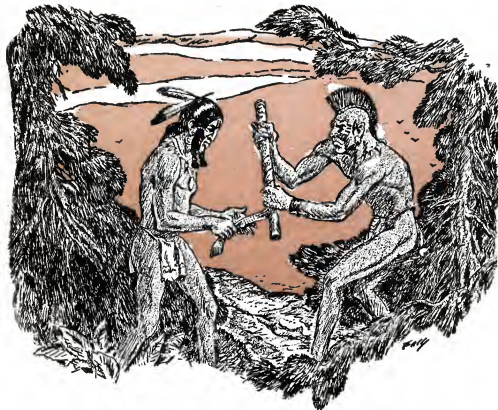
It is told that American Indians employed a primitive form of cryptography on this continent long before the coming of the white man. Not only did the Indians send mes-

sages over many miles by means of smoke signals and drumbeats, but they also are credited with a further refinement in the art of secret writing. This was the use of painted or beaded belts whose hieroglyphic-type characters aligned themselves into meaningful expressions or messages when the belt was wrapped spirally around a stick of a given diameter.

Cryptography, the art and practice of secret writing, has often had a profound effect on human affairs and the history of nations. By its use, allies in war or crime have found a means of transmitting their written expressions from one to the other without danger of the information becoming known to the enemy. Though their secret writings might be intercepted, the ingenuity of their construction was usually such as to forbid translation.

How was this done? How is it done today? To what extent is secret writing used? Is a cryptogram always secure? These are questions often asked by those whose imaginations are kindled by the mysteries of secret writing.

The greater part of cryptographic lore will forever remain secure behind the guarded doors and barred windows of the world's Black Chambers. However, certain basic principles upon which all cryptography is based are common property. By their use, anyone can construct a cryptographic system amply secure against translation by those not trained in cryptanalysis.



Painted or beaded belts whose hieroglyphic-type characters aligned themselves into messages when wrapped around a stick.

We have said "amply secure"; however, in any consideration of secret writing one fundamental axiom must be always remembered: no method of cryptography is theoretically immune to analysis and solution. Any cryptogram can be broken.

Cryptographic security, then, becomes a "time security." Assuming that any secret writing will eventually succumb to analysis, the cryptographer's first concern is: "How long will it be before the enemy will break this message and extract its meaning?" If he is using advanced methods of cryptography, or the so-called higher systems, his message may have a resistance-to-analysis time of many years. If, however, his method of secret writing is more commonly known, its resistance may only last a few hours under enemy analysis.

This, however, does not necessarily reflect discredit on the less secure system. If the message to be sent in a low-resistance system has as its text, "We will attack in two hours," it will matter little if the enemy breaks it in three hours—while the attack is in progress. Thus, a system relatively easy to break may well serve its function and save more complex and valuable systems from the burden of short-time-value messages.

How are cryptograms broken? How is it possible for a cryptanalyst to take an apparently meaningless array of five-letter code groups and render plain language from them?

First of all, it takes training, and the Government or its agencies are the only present-day teachers of cryptography and cryptanalysis. However, even without training, but by use of common sense and a few readily available charts and tables, you can break some apparently insoluble cryptograms.

First, it is necessary to decide whether the cryptogram you wish to solve was produced by a code or a cipher. These are two basic families of cryptography.

A code employs a minimum of two dictionarylike code books: one held by the sender of the message and used for encoding; and the other, identical with the first, by the receiver of the message and used for decoding. By definition coding is the application of cryptographic treatment to whole words or phrases of plain language.

Thus, the whole phrase, "We will attack at dawn," might be represented in a code book by the single five-letter group (say) ABCDE. Whenever it is necessary to use this phrase in a message, the group ABCDE is used, and upon receipt is looked up in a decoding book to render its meaning.

Unless it is possible to acquire an enemy code book, it is a difficult task to break a code. Codes are popularly used by espionage agents because they can express much in little space. Because of the restrictions imposed by the framing of the code book itself,

shades of meaning are not as easily translated into code as by other methods.

During World War One, the German master code was broken by British Intelligence. A disloyal German code clerk copied the entire code book, piece by piece, and turned over the information to British agents in Belgium. The task required several months, but once completed, German coded radio messages could be "read" as fast as they were intercepted. When it became known by the Germans that their code was broken, the trail led eventually to the guilty clerk. In his flight to England, he disappeared and has never since been found.

THE second family of cryptography is cipher, which, by definition is the application of cryptographic treatment to individual letters of the plain language.

Thus, in enciphering the phrase, "We will attack at dawn," it is necessary to set up the message in this fashion.

WEWILLATTACKATDAWN

Now then, the opportunities for encipherment from this point are many and varied. They fall into two principal classifications: the transposition cipher, wherein the original letters of the plain language are retained in the enciphered version of the message; or, the substitution cipher, wherein other letters of the alphabet are substituted for those in the original text.

For example, a simple form of transposition cipher would be to write the entire message in reverse, dividing the resultant cryptogram into the standard five-letter groups, thus:

NWADT AKCAT TALLI WEW

In such a form, the cryptogram bears no resemblance to the original text, yet all the original letters have been retained. Other and more complex methods of scrambling are, of course, employed, but all belong to the general transposition family.

Substitution ciphers are considered by expert cryptographers as more secure systems. Using a substitution system to encipher our message, work might proceed as follows.

Below is a reverse standard alphabet imposed upon a direct standard alphabet. The direct alphabet we will label the "clear" or plain language component, and the reverse alphabet we will call the "cipher" component, thus:

AB CDEFGHIJ KLMNOPQRSTU VWXYZ— (Clear)
ZYXWVUTSRQPONMLK JIHGFEDCA— (Cipher)

Now, taking the individual letters of our message in order, we fashion the following substitution-type cryptogram by taking the letters from the

cipher alphabet that correspond to the letters of the text, thus:

d v d r o o z g g z x p z g w z d m

In this cryptogram, none of the original letters have been retained, yet the receiver of the message, with knowledge of the method used in encipherment, can reverse the process and get the desired clear text.

How can an inexperienced person tell one type of cipher from another? If the cryptogram is long enough, this is easy. In a transposition cipher, the normal frequency of letters in the English language is not destroyed. Thus, E, the letter which is most common in the language and which appears approximately 591 times in every thousand words of English text, will still be the most often found letter in the transposition cryptogram. This is the clue that tells you that transposition has been employed.

If, however, your cryptogram has a high frequency of letters little used in the English language, such as Z, Q, J and X, it is a good bet that these are letters which have been substituted for high-frequency letters in the original text and that, therefore, a substitution system has been used.

This represents the first hurdle in cryptanalysis: the determination of the basic method employed by the cryptographer. Code or cipher? Substitution or transposition? Every written cryptogram, no matter how

complex, must fall into one or more of these categories.

After this determination, trial-and-error methods to extract the clear text are next in order. To help the cryptanalyst in this work, statistics of great value have been compiled. The most common aids are frequency tables, which give with good accuracy the occurrence of letters in any language. In English, for example, the five most common letters are E, T, A, O, and N, in that order. But, in German, they are E, A, S, I and T.

Not only frequency of single letters is valuable information, but also the frequency of bigrams and trigrams. Because of the word "the," the most common bigram in English is TH, appearing approximately 168 times in every thousand words of normal text. The trigram THE heads the list with over one thousand appearances in every twenty thousand words, while as a word, "the" will appear about 420 times in every twenty thousand words.

Such obscure statistics as the fact that more English words begin with T than any other letter (181 out of every one thousand) or end in E (222 in every one thousand) are also important and invaluable aids in the solution of cryptograms.

Even the small fact that the word "public" (for example) will appear six times in every ten thousand words of normal English language text may lead to success in breaking secret writing.

So, with the assistance of such statistics and the patience of a Sphinx, the cryptanalyst works.

Not all cryptography is written, however.

During World War One, the Germans employed a cryptographic trick that baffled the Allied code rooms for months. Over one of the German

The apparently innocuous German "whistle" broke up into easily readable Morse Code.



A German clerk copied the code and gave it to British agents.

radio stations which was broadcasting routine war news, a high-pitched whistle was often heard. The experts of Britain's famed "Room 40"—cryptanalysis department—associated nothing sinister with the sound. One night, however, as transcribed versions of the day's radio monitoring were being re-played on an old fashioned, hand-wound gramophone, the machine ran down, reducing the playing speed so that the apparently innocuous German "whistle" broke up into easily readable Morse Code. It was beamed at German forces in Africa. This too is an example of cryptography.

From the Indian warrior and his beaded code belt to the present time has been a long piece of history, and in that period cryptography has kept apace, growing ever more important in this world of great speed and great secrets. The cryptographer of yesterday was but an advanced crossword-puzzle addict compared to the cryptographic scientist of today.

It may well be still true in theory that no cryptogram, regardless of how produced, is immune to successful analysis. However, it is also true that analysis has had a hard race to keep up with the wonders of modern cryptography.

The race will go on, and man will continue to entrust his greatest secrets to the care of the world's Black Chambers.

Illustrated by
CHARLES B. FALLS



JOEL REEVE HAS WRITTEN MANY STORIES OF THE BOX-FIGHTING BUSINESS, BUT HE NEVER REPEATS HIMSELF—AS WITNESS THIS SPIRITED EPISODE.

by JOEL REEVE

A BELL

IN the beginning there was hunger, but Barney Savoy was young and tough, so the hunger really helped.

There was Corky Grogan, a small, wry man with bitterness in him, and a driving ambition. There was Dolly Grogan, his sister, a teen-ager, a tom-boy who hung around the gyms. No matter how often Corky chased Dolly away she would come back, absorbed in the doings of Barney Savoy.

That was the start of it, in a small California town, sunburned and raw, on the edge of the interminable fruit ranches. Anything was better than picking fruit among Okies from the Dust Bowl.

Corky taught Barney a lot, shrewdly used others who knew the science. Corky had a cough, and a cold eye. He said one day: "I can get this Joe Canning for you, a pro fight. You beat him, we will go to Arizona. I can get well in Arizona while we play that circuit. Down into Texas, over into New Mexico—you'll learn more."

"Am I ready to turn pro?" asked Barney, honestly surprised.

"You keep sticking with that left in there. You beat this Joe Canning. I'll do the rest."

"Sure, anything you say, Corky. Just so we eat good some day." Barney could laugh then, and train on leathery steaks and lumpy mashed potatoes.

Joe Canning was a real pro with twelve bouts under his belt. He was being built into an attraction in the Valley and Barney was to be a sacrifice on the altar of this promotion. They met outdoors in a tiny ball-park. Because of Canning, they were underneath the main and got a pretty good purse.

Barney was introduced as an amateur champion, which he was not. Corky took the robe from him and said sharply: "Stick with the left. Remember that. With the left."

The bell rang. This was the first bell of Barney's pro career, and maybe this was the first bell to record itself in his subconscious mind. After that there was always a bell tolling, and somehow the bells tied up with his life. Often it was too late when he

recognized the import of the bells, but they were with him, from then until the end—the sound of bells, deep inside his inner ear, somewhere inside the real Barney Savoy, the boy he was and the man he became.

Against Joe Canning he went out and dutifully stuck with the left. Even then he was very good with it. He got Canning into a corner with it.

Then Canning pulled the old swing-around on him, nailed him to the ropes and started belting away. Barney, startled, angry, fought back with more courage than brain. He bulldozed off the ropes and Canning swarmed him.

Corky yelled: "The left!" Canning had his head down, winging. Barney, half-frightened now, responded from reflex, swinging his right fist upward in a half-bolo, half-uppercot. It landed on Canning's chin.

Barney blinked, groping. Canning had disappeared. Corky was screaming. The referee was peering out over the ring apron. Barney hustled to a neutral corner.

When they got Canning back from the laps of the first-row patrons he was cold as a haddock. Corky came in, pale and shaking, coughing a little, muttering: "That's not the way. A sucker punch! You got a lot to learn, you dummy."

"Yeah," said Barney. "Yeah. I know. I was scared."

That was the beginning.

Corky got well in Arizona. Dolly went off to school for some time and Barney did not see her. Barney fought here and there. He did very well.

Dolly returned, and Barney looked, blinked, looked again. She was lovely. Corky gave from his end of ever-fattening purses to dress her, for Corky fiercely enveloped Dolly with whatever kindness there was in him. She wore nylon stockings and high heels, and even she appeared once in a hat, just to show them.

In El Paso, where they were getting ready for the Lew Jordan fight, Barney took her to a movie, then to a

"Excuse me, Mister," Barney said, bumping him, taking Dolly's elbow.



TOLLING

small place where there was beer and dancing. Neither danced very well, for lack of practice, but this did not deter their talk.

It was very hot in El Paso, and Dolly looked especially well in a thin summery dress; and Barney, with twenty straight wins to his record was fresh and unmarked and beginning to look largely upon life as though hunger had never existed.

He said: "You sure have got to be some babe, Dolly."

She shook her head. She had round dark eyes and startlingly long lashes. Her nose was slightly tip-tilted. Her mouth was touched with rouge, accentuating the fullness of her lower lip. "I'm not a babe. I'll never be a babe."

"I didn't mean it like that. I mean—you're beautiful."

She said solemnly, unblinking: "Do you believe that, Barney?"

He knew then how it was with her. He remembered things he had not before thought even to himself alone. He sat a moment drinking this heady wine. Then he said: "Let's get out of here. Let's take a drive."

He hired a car, and they drove out into the country. The night insects buzzed around them, and her lips were very young and sweet, but knowing too.

She spoke in a whisper: "It's always been you, Barney. Nobody but you."

"Gee, I'm just a fighter, baby."

"You'll be champion," she said fiercely. "You'll be great!"

He said: "Gee, you're sweet, Dolly." He kissed her again.

"All I ever have or will have is for you, Barney."

"You're so wonderful," he muttered against her hair.

There was a little Mexican chapel down the road from where they were parked. The bell tolled, and it was time to hurry back to the city where a stern Corky Grogan awaited them. He glared at them and spoke sharply about training hours, and then he spoke privately and even more sharply to Dolly.

BARNEY knocked out Lew Jordan in five.

That night Dolly told him that Corky would never consent to their



Barney blinked, groping. Canning had disappeared. The referee was peering over the ring apron.

marriage. Barney was confused, disbelieving. He did not know how to talk to Corky. He never quite knew how to talk to Corky.

They went, the three of them, to Riverton in California, where Barney was to meet Kid Stevens. They were at odds without words, Dolly strangely so, Barney uncomfortably so, Corky dour and determined.

What Barney could not understand was that Corky had been father, mother, brother to his sister, had picked fruit, had fought unsuccessfully in the ring, starved to get money to bring her out of an orphanage, and that this was to Corky reason that he

should own Dolly for all her life. The acquisitiveness of Corky's was something Barney could never understand.

All Barney could see was that he had obeyed Corky in so far as he was able; he did not dissipate nor chase women; he saved what money he obtained in the ring; he loved Dolly and wanted to marry her. When she did not flout Corky and run to him, he was dismayed and lost. . . .

He went into the ring against Kid Stevens confused beyond belief, and Stevens was rugged. Barney, following orders, went in with the left. Stevens plugged gently into it,

shrugged it off, swung solid blows at the head. Barney switched to a right and bounced one off the Kid's jaw. Stevens came right on, eyes glazed a bit.

Stevens began to bleed. Barney, honestly trying to be workmanlike, measured him and hit him with another right. Stevens just grinned and came in for more. In the fourth round Barney was looking for the referee to stop it, but that gentleman scowled and motioned for him to finish the game Stevens.

At the end of the round Corky said coldly: "You can't finish him. Keep that left in there; you're winnin' from here to hell and gone."

Barney said: "He's like iron. Only he bleeds. Poor guy!"

"Poor nothin'," snapped Corky. "It's a good win for you. Stab him to death."

Barney went out, his own head buzzing. He saw the courage in the other boy. Stevens almost tore off his head with a hook. Barney spun along the ropes—he had never been hit so hard. He came off and went to ring center and chopped in a left and came up with his bolo-like right.

Stevens blundered ahead, eating up the punches. Barney slugged him. Stevens went slowly down—and was up at nine. Barney gulped, almost weeping. He threw another right, the hardest blow he had ever struck. Stevens went over backward, kicked his heels against the floor, lay still. Barney rushed to his side, picking him up as the referee disgustingly motioned that the fight was ended. He could only breathe properly again when Stevens opened his eyes and weakly congratulated him, mumbling through bruised lips.

But in the dressing-room Corky said: "A messy job. You mighta hurt your hand on him. It wasn't clean."

"The poor guy is nothin' but tough," said Barney.

"Poor guy! He nearly got you with that hook. You had to go right-hand crazy again! You'll never get to New York this way. You're dumb, Barney. You know that? Dumb!"

"Maybe I am—"

"If it wasn't for me, you'd be pickin' fruit in the Valley. If I didn't shove you along, you'd be a bum!"

"Sure, Corky," said Barney mildly. "You been great. I didn't say you weren't great."

"And you stay away from Dolly!" Corky's rage was towering. "She's not for you. In Chicago—New York—Dolly can get anyone she wants. I want the best for her, understand?"

BARNEY had showered and was toweling himself. He finished and stepped into clean shorts. He stood a moment, staring at the floor. Now

there seemed to be a bell ringing in his head.

He looked up. "So that's the way it is, huh, Corky?"

"You heard me. I made you—I know you. A clown. I know what you can do, what you can't do—won't take the trouble to learn to do. You're not for Dolly; get that much at least into your thick head."

Barney sat down and reached for his socks. He said calmly: "I'm not smart—you're right, Corky. But you shouldn't have said that about me and Dolly."

"I said it, and I'll say it again. You leave her alone. If you don't, so help me I'll fix you if it takes me the rest of my life!"

"You shouldn't talk like that." Barney put on his trousers. "It's no good talking like that, Corky. No good."

RIVERTON is a Mission town. Dolly and Barney were not married in the Mission—they sneaked over to the office of the city clerk. But the Mission bells were chiming when they were married in Riverton.

When they told Corky, he aged ten years before their eyes. It seemed as though he would have a stroke then and there. He did not even glance at Barney. He just stared hard and long at Dolly. Then he said:

"You made a mistake. A terrible mistake."

"No," said Dolly. "Barney will be a champion. He will be great, and we will be happy. I love Barney."

"You never knew anyone else."

"I don't want to know anyone else!"

"In Chicago, New York—agh! I wanted things for you."

"Barney will get them!"

He looked at Barney then, and his eyes were burned out, dead. "Him! He'll never be a champion. I know him."

"He will, too!"

They were arguing about it as though he were not present. It came to Barney then that there was a stronger bond between brother and sister than he had realized. Chains had been forged by the circumstances of their beginnings that were a link he would have to break, or upon which he would be broken. He felt weak, futile, hearing them, sensing the feeling behind their words. . . .

In Chicago they were happy. Barney fought Cal Callow and won, an important bout. He obtained a chance at Jimmy Doolin.

Dolly bought clothes galore and golden trinkets, yellow gold, of which she was very fond. They were young, married and in love. For a while Corky faded, a bitter little man, silent and forbidding, but shadowy. Once he took Dolly to College Inn while

Barney was busy elsewhere, and it developed he had met some young sporting millionaires or their equivalent, and they made much over Dolly, and Corky said: "There. You see? You could have had any one of them." "I don't want them," she said quietly.

So Corky was silent, and Barney fought Jimmy Doolin, who was near the top of their class. And in the third round, despite Corky's orders to use the left and move around and take it easy, Barney cut loose.

It came about because Doolin, a good boy, gave Barney his first deep cut. The blood was warm on Barney's cheek, and he knew it was a bad cut and immediately Barney cut loose.

He dropped a left to the body, and when Doolin doubled over he came up with the sucker punch. The half-bolo laid Doolin into the ropes. Barney, charging in, splattered Doolin all over the big club as people howled and screamed delight.

A new star was born that night. They rode to New York on the tail of the comet, and into the big money. They went into the Garden, and Barney was wild and woolly with the famed right hand, and Corky said nothing but bargained shrewdly and banked his end of the money.

THAT was the year of the war, the second World War. Dolly and Barney had a suite in a good hotel, and discovered the theater and the Stork Club and Toots Shors.

There was a lot of talk about matching Barney with the champion, but nothing was ever done about it. There were other fights, up and down the East Coast, but never the champion.

Barney asked: "When do we fight for the title, Corky?" Their enmity was almost forgotten; they were busy and making money.

"I can't tie him up," said Corky blandly.

"I could beat him. He's gettin' old."

"I know, but he won't sign." Corky was signing up other boxers, getting himself into the fistic scene of the big wheel. Corky always had plenty of money. Somehow Dolly and Barney spent their end, but Corky was doing all right.

Barney said: "I sure would like to be champ."

"You're doing all right. You're making plenty," said Corky. "Don't worry about the championship."

Barney complained to Dolly, but she said: "Go on with you! Corky knows best. We're doing fine. Aren't you happy?"

He reassured her, not too gently, upon that point, and she laughed with him and it was forgotten. Bar-

ney went on fighting. He accumulated scars, for he would always go to the bolo punch, and there were smart boys who could beat him to it and knock his nose crooked or cut his eye. But he was rugged, and he had that spirit, and he won; he always won.

The war broke over them like a wave. Corky was exempt, with scar tissue on his lung. But Barney was cannon-fodder for sure. Some pride kept him from asking favors, and he enlisted.

He said good-by to Dolly. She wept.

"You could have had a job as instructor. You could have had something over here."

Barney said: "Not for me, chicken."

She said: "Corky could have arranged it. Oh, Barney, I'm so scared." She was going to live with Corky, in a large apartment he had fixed up. She had nothing to frighten her, Barney thought.

"I did this my way, not Corky's way. I had to do something my way, honey, don't you understand? Don't you get it, baby?"

"I'm scared," she said over and over, clinging to him.

It was long before he knew why she was frightened and maybe neither ever quite knew, but the alarm rang all too soon, and Barney was gone into the Air Corps, a sergeant, and very proud to have won his stripes the hard way.

It was more than four years before the Air Corps was through with Barney Savoy. There were some medals and citations and a discharge with honor, but it was fifty-odd months. He flew back to New York from the Pacific in uniform.

It was a fine apartment Corky had rented. Barney felt strange and unkempt in this place. When Dolly came in, he grabbed her—and smelled at once the difference in her perfume, felt the difference in the expensive material of her gown. Then in her kiss he knew it all.

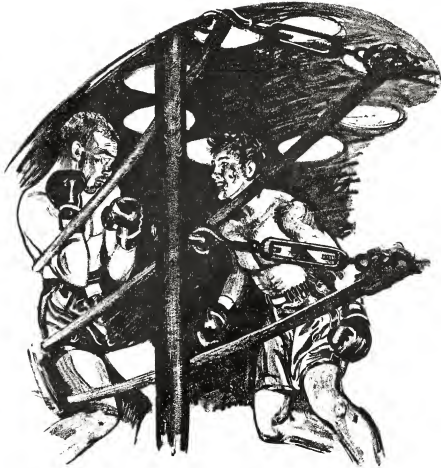
She said: "Barney, you're so thin. Hurry and get out of that uniform!" Her voice was different, too.

Her hair was tinted; there were little lines at the corners of her eyes. He could have loved the little lines, but she looked at him with eyes that were different.

He said: "Sure. All right. I'll get out of it—quick!"

She said coolly: "I'll wait here. I laid out your clothes. There'll be some people in."

He went into the bedroom. It was high-ceilinged, huge; and it was a woman's bedroom, where she had lived alone. There was a suit on the



On the ropes, Carter tried to fight back. He could see nothing but the gentle smile of the man who attacked him.

king-sized bed, a blue suit, the only one he had owned. There were dark socks and black shoes he had never seen before, and a conservative, maroon necktie, also new. He dressed in a daze, and everything was a bit too large for him.

He went back into the living-room. The bell kept ringing and people kept coming in—it was one of those chime bells that played a small tune. Corky came in.

Corky shook hands and said: "You're underweight." His eyes were cold and calculating and triumphant in a secret way, and Barney knew fear then.

"Yeah. But gimme some steaks and a little rest and I'll be all right. Got a new champ now, huh?"

"A good one, young and strong," nodded Corky.

"Yeah, a good one." Barney was looking at Dolly. She was laughing at something a handsome man with too much careful blond hair was saying to her.

Corky said: "Sonny Worthman. A millionaire."

Maybe Barney had lost something—or gained something—in the long months away. Maybe it was the way

Corky mouthed the word "millionaire." Barney's voice sounded harsh and distant in his own ears. "What kind of a rat-race is this?"

Corky said: "We only go first class now, Barney. Real people." He was smirking. He was riding a wave, Barney knew.

"Made a lot of progress during the war, huh?"

Corky said flatly: "Dolly never need want for anything."

"Even talk different. Like your mouth is full of mush."

"You wouldn't understand." Corky wasn't even greatly interested. There was contempt in him. "You never did have it. You never were great. Now—why you're old, Barney. For a pug, you're an old man. You don't look like you could take it any more, Barney!"

Barney drew a deep breath. "Maybe you're right. Maybe I can't take it."

"Oh, I can get bouts for you. You'd better start training. You're broke, of course," said Corky carelessly.

"Broke? Not me. I got my severance pay," said Barney. "Don't bother to get me a fight, pal. Our contract ran out, remember?"

Corky nodded. "Maybe it's better that way." He looked away from Barney, at Dolly and the blond rich man. "Okay, Barney."

Barney walked across the room. He said to Worthman, "Excuse me, Mister," and bumped him aside, taking Dolly's elbow. He marched her into the bedroom, closed the door.

She said: "Please, Barney—"

He stared into her eyes. She seemed very far away, although their faces were only inches apart. He said: "I was going to tell you to pack. But I'm not that dumb. You don't want out of this. You like this, with Corky and all the fancy folks."

"Barney, you—you've got to understand."

"Me? I got to understand?" He shook his head. Outside in the apartment an incoming guest rang the tuneful bell, and it echoed within him. He said: "Look, it's been a long time. You've got a new set of things. You think they are good. I can't get through to you—I'm not a talker, Dolly. But I can tell you this—you'll always know where I am. I'll always tell you where I am—until the time comes when I don't want you any more."

"Barney!"

"I don't think I'll ever *want* you, though. I don't think so. Long, Dolly."

He moved off through the crowd of people with his head high. He even smiled at Corky, at Worthman, as he went. She took one step in his wake, then stopped. He was right—it had been a long time. She closed the door to the room and sat before a mirror, staring at herself, tearless but aching within her for something far away and dim.

SOMEHOW it did not go right with Barney. He fought Buck Nevin before he was ready. Essaying to manage himself, he trained wrong. Nevin beat him.

He never really recovered from the four-year lay-off which the service of his country had required of him. Perhaps his spirit was dimmed by that other thing gnawing at his innards. He drifted westward, like a homing pigeon, and in Hollywood he found employment and an occasional bout at the Legion.

In the San Fernando Valley there were small ranches, some of them workable, if a man had strong arms and back and knew a bit about fruit and trees and the good land. He made a down payment on one of these, and then he struggled to get out from under mortgages. It became the greatest fight of his life, and when prices were depreciated one year, he was close to losing it. So he agreed to come back and fight Cal Carter.

It was another mistake. The young Negro fighter was ready. This win would start Carter on the upward path to riches and glory, could he knock out even an aging Barney Savoy. He had an educated left hand, good legs, this boy, and the thing they wanted to know and which Barney was to prove was—did he have heart?

Carter had heart. Barney knew this almost at once. It was heart backed by that left, handicapped only by inexperience. When Carter's right hand connected and Barney hit the canvas, he heard the bell tolling more plainly than ever before. This was, he well knew, close to the end.

Barney was not aware of trying to rise. His mind was far off; it was reflex action which unbent his knees, sent his hand shoving against the floor of the ring. The crowd in the fight club shouted, but it was a murmur behind the bells that kept ringing. Barney sighed, pushing against the floor of the ring. He had not thought this would be the last fight, yet he was ready. In a way, he thought, he had accomplished the small thing he had wanted to accomplish.

The bell inside him almost tolled ten, but he came up. He was bleed-

ing from the nose and there was a shanty over his eye. He waited for the referee to wipe off his gloves. He sucked in deep breaths of the smoke-laden air.

He saw the brown eyes of Cal Carter harden, saw the boy come whipping in with the left. It was a hook, and he rolled with it, but his speed was gone, and when Carter's right came in behind the left, he went backward into the ropes, bounced off and was met with another right.

He went down. The sound of it blurred together now, like "seven-eight-nine—" But a gong clanged loudly, and two blasé handlers came and lugged him to the corner.

He kept trying to get air as they clumsily patched his cuts. The whistle blew, and they clumped down out of the way, and Barney arose from the stool, an old habit which made him appear eager and ready for the fray. He was as fresh and eager as yesterday's newspaper out on a rain-drenched trash-pile!

This was it, he knew. Here was this Cal Carter and here was Barney Savoy who had been the whole route and here was an ending. The bell sounded. He went forward, hands high, grinning.



She came close, weeping a little. "You never stopped wanting me. Your letters—the things you've done, building this place."

Cal Carter came with a barrage of blows. Barney used his left hand, working free, thinking of Corky as he used the jab. He uncanned, seeking an opening he did not find. He accepted punches from the eager young lad, knowing admiration for the speed and cleverness of the brown-skinned boy.

He wanted only one thing now. He had never been kayoed. He had lost too many bouts, but never had they put him down for keeps. He wanted to last now. He strove to counter; his timing was off, Carter knocked him down again.

Someone yelled "Stop the fight," but Barney, on one knee, turned and smiled in the direction of the voice, shaking his head and others cheered his gameness, however ironically.

"Seven, eight, nine—"

Barney got up.

Cal Carter was puzzled. He walked around the battered, scarred figure of Barney Savoy. Going in, he deftly planted a jab on Barney's bad eye.

BARNEY was thirty-three years old now. Lean, tanned, he still moved well, but the timing was off. He was taking this beating for a reason, and a good one, but he was thirty-three years old and he would not fight again. He had never been a champion and he never would be, but he wanted not to be knocked out this last time. He fainted with head and shoulders, looking for an opening.

Cal Carter was cautious. He slid in, using his speed to strike and get away. He could not understand the smile his aged opponent wore like a badge. It was not, Carter recognized, the foolish grin of a slap-happy beaten man. It was not a grimace designed to cover impending defeat. It was a nice, natural smile, and it disturbed Cal Carter.

Yet the colored boy gathered himself, went in, using a one-two, knowing he should finish it. He slammed to the body, then up, quick, to the head.

Barney did not run away. He came in. A whirling right like a string with a rock tied on its end struck into the lean ribs of Cal Carter. The youngster went back. His mouth was suddenly dry. His eyes bulged.

Barney Savoy plodded forward. He fainted. Again the bolo-like punch smashed through the smoke-filled air, going against Carter's jaw, knocking him sideways.

On the ropes, Carter tried to fight back. He could see nothing but the gentle smile of the man who attacked him. There was blood at its edges, but the smile was genuine. Carter sagged. A left straightened him. A swinging right lifted him. He tried to get loose, to run. He found Barney waiting.

There was pity in the smile now, and there was a light in the eyes beneath the scarred brows, too. Barney shifted, weaved and threw the half-upercut.

The blow landed on the point of Carter's chin. The boy lost his rubber mouthpiece. His jaw dropped. He leaned forward, as though to dance, into the arms of Barney Savoy.

Barney signaled to the referee. He knew. There would be no count. The rafters of the fight club rang with the cheers of those who had seen an old warhorse come back from the brink of oblivion to a last splurge of glory—and this was enough. He went over to Carter's corner and whispered to the dazed boy: "I suckered you. An old sucker punch. Don't you fret, you'll be all right. They all told me—nobody but me would be dumb enough to use that sucker punch. Get one of your own, Cal, get something of your own. You'll be all right."

HE got into his car and drove north, out of Los Angeles, onto the open road. There was three hundred dollars in his wallet. He rode out Ventura in the San Fernando Valley, not twenty-five miles from town. He took a side road and after a while he came to a gate which led to a small ranch. He parked his car in an open shed next to the chicken-run and took his old bag and walked up to the house. It was a small house built of cedar slabs. There were fruit trees out back and there was a large vegetable garden. There was a happy mongrel dog which leaped and gave voice.

There was a light in the house and Barney smiled, as he had smiled at Cal Carter. He went into the long, low-ceilinged ranch-type living-room

which he had designed and built with his own hands.

Dolly got up from his chair, the one alongside the radio. She said, "Hello, Barney."

Her hair was its natural color again. The lines at the corners of her brown eyes were deeper, but she looked very good. She looked, in fact, wonderful.

He said, "I got your wire, but I had a fight to make. Had to have the last three hundred for the mortgage, like I wrote you. How's Corky, baby?"

"Corky—New York did for Corky." Her lips seemed stiff; it was hard for her to talk. "Slowly, surely—it did for him. He's in Arizona—for good, this time."

"Too bad," said Barney sincerely. "I'm sorry, baby."

"Barney—I made a terrible mistake." She passed one hand over her eyes, shook her head. "I was—it was as if I went to sleep while you were away. It took a bump to wake me up."

"Sure—that's right, Dolly; it takes somethin' to wake us all up."

She said, "Barney—" She came close to him, weeping a little. He gently stroked her hair. "You never stopped wanting me. Your letters—the things you've done, building this place. I've been all over it—with your dog. He—he likes me."

Barney said: "Ah—it's nothin', baby. Just a li'l' place. And we had a bad year. But now the mortgage's cleared. Tonight we got the dough to clear the mortgage."

"You were beaten, Barney. Your poor face..."

"No. I win," he said. He grinned at her. "I never got to be champ, did I? But I win the last one."

She said: "Barney, when Corky cracked up, he went bad. All bad. I saw it then. And I'm begging—I'm here to beg—"

"Agh," he said. "Stop that. I knew you'd come. The bell didn't have the guts."

"Bell, Barney? What bell?"

"In that fancy-fancy apartment. A tony sort of bell." He laughed aloud. He spun her around as though she were a doll. Over the mantel was a painting. It was a view of the old Mission at Riverton. "Remember those bells? When we were married? They rang deep, down deep. Now—listen." He was looking at his strap watch, smiling gently, his arm about her.

At the far end of the room a clock struck a deep chiming note, struck again and again. He held her hand and she still liked yellow gold, because she wore her wedding band of plain gold.

"Three o'clock, and all's well," he chuckled. "Dolly's home, and the bell's rung for her."



The Stone of Destiny

IT HAS BEEN STOLEN BEFORE IN THE COURSE OF ITS AMAZING AGE-LONG HISTORY; ALWAYS HITHERTO, CONSCIENCE HAS DRIVEN THE THIEVES TO RETURN IT.

by CHARLES WELLINGTON FURLONG

THE mysterious theft of the most ancient and precious relic of a realm is startling news. But when a beautiful princess, sea-raiders, a coronation stone of kings, a history and tradition that goes back to the days of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob¹ and the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel are all involved, it will continue to be news until the mystery of the theft is solved and the Stone returned to its rightful place.

Last Christmas Eve, the recesses of St. Edward's Chapel in Britain's sacred

Abbey of Westminster echoed the sweet music of Noël. In the Chapel stood Britain's Coronation Chair, under it the Coronation Stone, standing just as they had stood for seven hundred years. In the silent, eerie dimness of the small hours of Christmas morning furtive figures stealthily entered St. Edward's Chapel, then were gone—and so was the Coronation Stone.

How this Stone, measuring about 10½"x16"x26" and weighing 336 pounds, was so surreptitiously spirited

from its resting-place and out of the locked Abbey, and why, is the greatest mystery of today. A broken leg splinter of the Coronation Chair, a short crowbar, some fingerprints, an unidentified wristwatch on the flagstones of the Abbey floor, marks on the altar steps' carpet where the Stone had been dragged, and "J.F.S." carved on the chair itself were the only evidences of this sacrilegious crime, which shocked all Britain, and the solving of which is now Number One on the agenda of Scotland Yard.

In the light of Bible history no other inanimate thing on earth has been given such highly honored use, glorious prominence or divinely declared purpose as that given to this



block of sandstone, this Stone of Destiny which, after some 3823 years of peregrinations and preservation, has suddenly disappeared.

What is its origin? What enshrines it with an importance far beyond its intrinsic value?³

Down through the ages man's symbols became enlarged in their significance, from mere portrayals of visualized things to symbolized ideas, ideals, standards, guilds, institutions, creeds and ideologies. These symbols became signs of beliefs, faiths, covenants and creeds for which men have lived, fought and died.

Throughout the ages peoples, especially oppressed peoples, have demanded leaders who could give them a "sign" which would free them from slavery and death and lead them out of the wilderness of oppression. That sign might be a cloud by day, a pillar of fire by night, a cross or a crescent, a symbol on a banner or on a battle shield. *The power of the symbol was not in the symbol itself, but in man's faith in the intangible property it represented, and in the interpretation he gave it.* So, for this Stone of Destiny, its power lies in the significance of the interpretation it has for those whom it concerns. . . .

In appearance the rugged surface of the Stone is of a steely dull-purplish color, varying somewhat, and with some reddish veins. In it a few pebbles are imbedded, one of quartz and two others of a dark material, and across it runs a crack. Some chisel-marks are still visible on one or two sides, and on each end is an iron ring. The rock is calcareous, and called by masons freestone. Perhaps the most interesting thing about it is that *no similar rock formation exists in the British Isles;* but the Rev. Canon Tristram states that *there is a stratum of sandstone near the Red Sea, geologically just like the Coronation Stone.*

The history of this stone reveals a fantastic story, fascinating as it is significant: a story that not only epitomizes the history of Ireland, Scotland and England, but offers an astonishing revelation pertaining to the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel, and centers about the destiny of the Anglo-Saxon peoples—in fact, of the entire English-speaking world and certain races culturally and spiritually identified with it.⁴

In the entire history of mankind no other stone or racial symbol has been so long possessed by the descendants of its original owners. Since it first came into historic notice, it has occupied an exalted place, and it would be difficult to portray *"the supreme greatness of that position (to) which prophecy declares it shall yet be raised."*



What of the Pillar Stone? This little company had brought it with them to Ireland.

In lands of the Middle East, when members of caravans pitch their tents at night, it is the custom for them to bolster their pillows or part of their bedding with stones to insure a comfortable position for rest and sleep. (When I was living in the tents of desert Arabs in northern Syria, they arranged my bedding for me by using a camel saddle as a prop, in lieu of a stone.) It was on such a stone bolster that Jacob, when camping on the plains of Luz,⁵ rested his head on a certain night on his way to Padanaram. During that night Jacob had his famous dream, resulting in his great revelation of the Divine Covenants and Promises, as formerly given by God to Jacob's father Isaac and his grandfather Abraham in 1916 B.C.

Jacob was so spiritually impressed that, to memorialize the occasion and the place, he blessed the Stone on which his head had rested, sanctified it by anointing it with oil, and set it up as a pillar to mark the spot. Jacob vowed: "If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and raiment to keep on, so I come again to my father's house (Bethel) in peace; then shall the Lord be my God, and this Stone (pillow) which I have set up for a pillar (marker) shall be God's House."

Twenty years passed, and Jacob was directed by the Lord to return to Bethel. In the interim, Jacob had been blessed not only with great riches but by a knowledge that *there (Bethel) was his God.* On his return, Jacob had a vision, and the Lord again spoke to him, saying, "I am the God of Bethel," and Jacob's name was changed to Israel, meaning "God Rules." Thus the Lord associated himself not only with the place of the vision but with the Bethel Stone. Israel then carried the Stone away with him and became "the father of the twelve patriarchs who were the

progenitors of that great multitude called 'Bethel'—the 'House of God,' the 'Families of God,' the 'Hidden Ones' (The Ten Lost Tribes), 'Israel.'" From then on this Stone, wherever it was set up as a pillar, marked the site of the altar to the God of Israel.

At the time of the Great Famine in Palestine and Egypt, Joseph, Jacob's favorite son, was Governor of that latter realm. So down into Egypt, carrying the Stone with him, went Jacob, with his children, grandchildren and their families. Through Joseph's influence a large district called Goshen, east of the Nile Delta, was granted to Jacob and his large family by the Pharaoh Thothmes III. Here Jacob's descendants lived for about two hundred and fifteen years until the Exodus in 1486 B.C., having increased to about two and a half million people.

A lot of food and water was required during their forty years of wandering in the wilderness. We have the account of food being provided in the form of *manna*; but there are two instances recorded of the Lord providing them miraculously with water—once when the Israelites were camped at Rephidim in Horeb; the other at Kadish, the city on the border of Edom, the present Negeb.

The Lord said unto Moses: "Thou shalt smite the rock before their eyes, . . . and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock." Moses obeyed, and water gushed forth. So this rock, this Stone, not only served as an altar marker in the wilderness, but through it, the Israelites' physical as well as spiritual needs were supplied.⁶

After some 215 years in Egypt, the Bethel Stone returned to Palestine. Here it rested in the Temples of Jerusalem, and served as the Coronation Stone for the Israelite kings, ending with King Zedekiah c. 578 B.C.



Jacob, anointing the Stone, set it up as a pillar to mark the spot.

Joseph, whose Egyptian name was Zapnath-Paaneah, married Asenath, an Egyptian woman. By her he had two sons, Manassah and Ephraim, but Jacob prophesied that the younger, Ephraim, would be greater than his brother, saying: "His seed shall become a multitude of nations."

Now Gatholus, one of Ephraim's direct descendants, had implicit faith and belief in Jacob's prophecy, and went west from Egypt by way of the Mediterranean. Although a prince of the court of the Pharaoh Rameses II, and the husband of Scota, Pharaoh's daughter, he had the ambitions of an explorer and a pioneer. He built a large fleet of galleys, and with many followers sailed down the Nile, headed westward through the Mediterranean and eventually reached Celtiberia (southern Spain), where this descendant of Ephraim founded a nation (Ephraim-Samaria-Israel), and the fulfillment of Jacob's prophecy began.⁷

When the Land of Canaan was divided among the children of Jacob a part of the inheritance, Bethel, fell to the House of Joseph, the birthright family, that of Judah being to the

south and the portion that fell to the children of Benjamin lying between. Not only Bethel, the city or place, but also "Bethel," the Pillow-Pillar Rock, was given to the birthright family after Israel (Jacob) had carried that rock with him into Egypt. It was committed to the care of the House of Joseph and thence to Ephraim, the younger of Joseph's two sons.⁸ Thus the Ephraimites were not only custodians of the Bethel Stone, but of the Covenants to which it had been set up as a memorial and witness over 1700 years before the birth of Jesus.

Over five hundred years before Jesus, the ten non-Jewish tribes of Israel, taken captive by the Assyrians, left Palestine. They were later dispersed and lost, even to the Jews (Judah, Benjamin and some Levites). Later, even the fate of Jeremiah and the little royal remnant with him was likewise a mystery.

In the light of recent research, the transigrations of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel makes a fascinating study.⁹ Their trails, over the centuries, lead from Assyria through the

Caspian Gate into the Caucasus; then westward around the northern shore of the Black Sea, through eastern Europe to Saxony, Denmark, the Scandinavian Peninsula, Normandy and the British Isles. With this overland column went a company of the inland Dan-ites, with the rest of Samaria-Israel. But the tribe of Dan was both a coastal and an inland people. Along the coasts of Palestine, Dan "abode in his ships," and sailed to Ireland.

Students of prophecy¹⁰ call attention to the Scriptural message to Ephraim through Jeremiah, saying: "I am Father to Israel, and Ephraim is my first-born. Hear the Word of the Lord, O ye nations, and declare it in isles afar-off and say, he that scatters Israel will gather him."

These isles are described as being in great waters and northwest from Palestine. The British Isles are as directly northwest from Palestine as the lines of latitude and longitude can lay them. There are innumerable evidences that it is in the British Isles that Ephraim-Israel is chiefly found today, and that from them have come nations and multitudes of nations and "Kings from their loins."

Many historians and writers identify the Welsh, Irish, Scotch and English as descendants of certain of the Israelitish tribes who, of course, take their descent from Isaac's sons.

Many of the Jews (Judah) had a preference for the name of Jacob, but the other Ten Tribes of Israel "clung to the name of Isaac, especially after they were taken into captivity by the Assyrians, when they dropped the name of Israel and called themselves "Saac, Saccæ, or Saxæ, as per Latin derivation." This is nothing more or less than the Hebrew name of Isaac (Saac), from which the initial letter has been dropped.

These migration routes of the Lost Tribes may be traced by their symbols, records, tablets, monuments, language and place names. Ephraim, in particular, obeyed the injunction (Jeremiah 31:21) "Set thee up waymarks."

The Dan-ite overland column, like the Ephraimites, left their waymarks and names along their northwestward migrating routes—Don (River of Dan or Don), Dan-ube (River of Dan), Danislograd (City of the Dan-ites); they left their marks as Dan-es in Dan-merke. The seafaring Dan-ites, even earlier, left their nomenclature in Ireland; in fact her first settlers are called *Tuatha de Dan-aans*—the Tribe of Dan. Then later came the Dan-es and merged the name of Dan with that of their earlier brethren, sailing, raiding and settling as far south as Dun-more near Waterford (Water-Fiord), where the Dan-ish Tower still stands. In fact, Ireland, like Scotland

and England, is full of Dans, Dens, Dons and Duns.

Several generations after Gatholus and his Ephraimites settled in Celtiberia, one of these Celti, named Eremon, invaded Eireann (Ireland) and established his kingdom in Ulster, in the Sixth Century B.C. Here he built a beautiful palace, later called Team-hair Breagh, and eventually Tara.¹¹ In about 585 B.C. a small but distinguished group of strangers arrived in Ulster and presented themselves at his court. They had fled from Palestine to Tahpanes, Egypt,¹² whence they probably had come to Ireland by way of Celtiberia, the land of their Ephraim-Israelite cousins.

In this group was an important patriarch saint called *Ollam Folla*, meaning "a revealer" or "prophet." This aged man was the guardian of the beautiful Tea-Tephi, a princess descended from a Pharaoh and a daughter of Zedekiah,¹³ last King of Palestine. The prophet was accompanied by his scribe, called Simon Brug or Baruch. Now, Baruch was the name of Jeremiah's scribe in Judea, who with Jeremiah and Tea-Tephi, had escaped from the Babylonian captivity to Tahpanes, Egypt.¹⁴ While in Egypt, Princess Tea-Tephi, because of her

royal Egypto-Israelite descent, had been protected and honored.

But what of the Bethel, the Pillar Stone (God's House), upon which the monarchs of Israel had been crowned? Monarchic as it may seem, *Jeremiah and this little company had brought it with them, and also a royal harp and an ark.* It is a significant fact that the royal arms of Ireland was the harp of David, and has been such for 2500 years. Tea-Tephi was King Zedekiah's daughter and succeeded to the throne of David. Irish historians knew her as the "King's Daughter" and as the "Daughter of God's House," and to the people to whom Tea-Tephi brought the stone B-th-l—God's Stone—she could have been no other than the daughter of that House. Evidence of her disappearance from Egypt is still preserved in her name Tara, the root word from "Taph," meaning "one banished" or "in flight." The grave of Jeremiah is one of the noted spots in Ireland, a country whose early history is one of the world's mysteries.

King Eremon must have been deeply in love with the lovely Tea-Tephi, for he agreed to two conditions of marriage which Jeremiah exacted—that he (Eremon) should abandon his former religion, and that he should

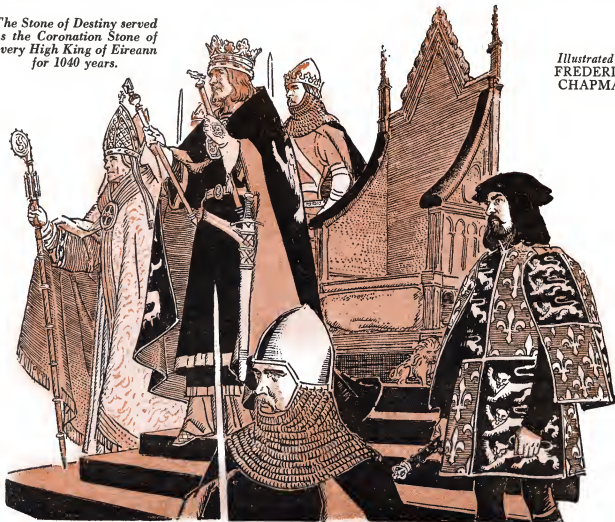
build a college to the prophets. So he founded *Mur-Ollam*, which in Hebrew and Irish, means "School of the Prophets;" and the names of both his capital, Lothair, and his palace, were changed to Tara. Historians of Erin also recorded both Tea-Tephi's marriage to King Eremon, and her coronation on the Bethel Stone.¹⁵

According to Prof. Totten of New Haven, "The altars of ancient Ireland were called *Botal* or *Bothal*, meaning the House of God. It is from the Hebrew word B-th-l and has the same meaning." So, in the union of Tea-Tephi, a descendant of David, and Eremon, a descendant of Joseph, it *not only left the Bethel Stone in the possession of the House of Joseph, but united the two principal kingdoms of Israel, Judah and Ephraim.* Many bards have sung of Tara's halls, but one Amergin, chief bard to King Dermot, a Sixth Century monarch of Ireland, wrote of Tea-Tephi:

A rampart raised around her house,¹⁶
For Teah, the daughter of Lughaidh,
She was buried outside in her mound,
And from her it was named Tea-mur.

But what of the crack in the solid surface of the Stone of Destiny? Was it made when Moses smote the rock?

The Stone of Destiny served as the Coronation Stone of every High King of Eireann for 1040 years.



*Illustrated by
FREDERICK
CHAPMAN*

The iron rings, and a pole groove along the top of the Stone, worn from handling, bear witness to its long migrations. How and when were they worn? Not while in the Temples of Jerusalem, in Tara's royal halls, or later in the castle of Dunstaffnage, in the Abbey of Scone, nor in that of Westminster. It must have been on the journey with Jacob to Egypt and being carried and handled during the wanderings of Israel in the wilderness and later, to account for the wear of the rings. *This stone has followed the fortunes and misfortunes of its people for nearly four thousand years.*

The ancient Gaelic word for the Bethel Stone is "*Lia-Fail*," (pronounced *Leeah-Faail*) meaning Stone of Fate or Hoary of Destiny, and it comprises seven letters. If one starts with "*f*," the fourth letter, and reads either to the right or left, one has, in

both instances, the same word, *fail*. If one starts from either the right or left end, or reads to the central letter and then back again from either end, one has the full name, *Lia-Fail*. It is sometimes spelled *Lea-Gael*. This word also has seven letters and exactly the same peculiarities in spelling as *Lia-Fail*.

The Stone of Destiny remained at the Palace of Team-hair Breagh, as the Coronation Stone of every Ard-Righ (High King) of Eireann for a period of 1040 years; from Tea-Tephi to the 131st Ard-Righ, named Murcheartach.

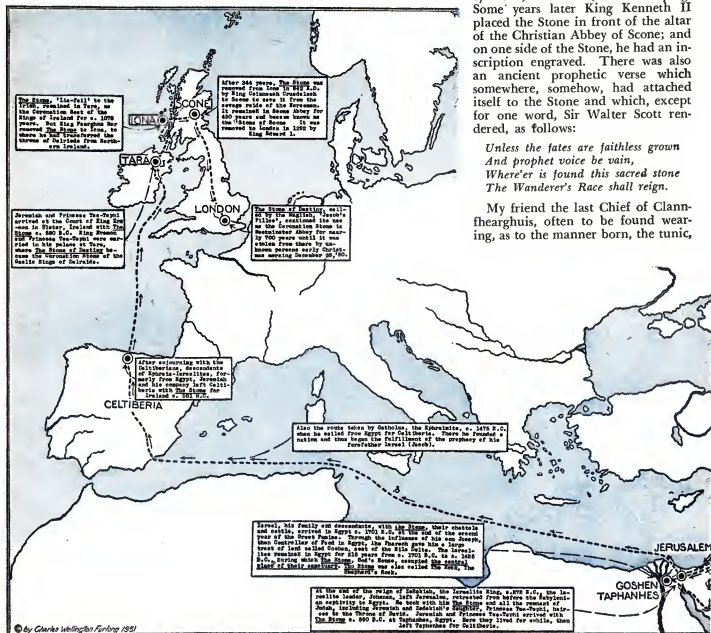
Now this Murcheartach had a brother, Fearghus Mor (the Great), to whom, without the council, he lent the Stone. Fearghus transferred it to his highland castle of Dúnnonaigh, later called Dunstaffnage, on the island of Iona, Scotland. Here, in

Reilig Odhrain, are buried forty-eight kings of the Clannfhearghuis tribe, who were crowned on the *Lia-Fail*. In 498 A.D., Fearghus Mor ascended the throne of Dalriada, the ancient kingdom in North Ireland and promptly transferred the Stone to Argyll in western Scotland, which was settled by his Gaelic followers from Ireland. (The present Chief of Clannfhearghuis of Stra-chur, is a distinguished member of the Explorers Club.)

In Iona the *Lia-Fail* continued to be used as the Coronation Stone of the Dalriadic kings until the Ninth Century. But Iona had long been subjected to savage attacks by the Norsemen, who raided the coasts of Scotland, England and Ireland. So Coinneach Cruadalach (the Hardy), King of Alba (Scotland) in 842 A.D., removed the *Lia-Fail* far east to the town of Scone, near Perth, for safekeeping. Some years later King Kenneth II placed the Stone in front of the altar of the Christian Abbey of Scone; and on one side of the Stone, he had an inscription engraved. There was also an ancient prophetic verse which somewhere, somehow, had attached itself to the Stone and which, except for one word, Sir Walter Scott rendered, as follows:

*Unless the fates are faithless grown
And prophet voice be vain,
Where'er is found this sacred stone
The Wanderer's Race shall reign.*

My friend the last Chief of Clannfhearghuis, often to be found wearing, as to the manner born, the tunic,



sanctified were worth both living and dying for.

One need not worry too much about the geographical location of the Stone. Through the ages it seems to have fulfilled its Divine purpose and the prophecy of Israel. *Perhaps* we are reaching the time when the Old Order passeth, including the Divine Right of Kings. *Perhaps* we are at the beginning of the New Order which shall herald the coming of the Divine Brotherhood of Man and Fatherhood of God, the basis of a truly democratic society.

The theft of the Stone of Destiny is still wrapped in mystery. *Perhaps*—well, does anyone doubt but that its destiny will be fulfilled, and that it will be restored to its rightful place?

(¹) Refer under the respective names to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

(²) The measurements vary slightly in different records as, for instance, c. 11"x-13"x-22".

(³) Genesis 12:8; Genesis 28:11-22.

(⁴) *Miracles of History*, Pgs. 29, 103-107 by David Davidson, Covenant Pub. Co., Ltd., 6 Buckingham Gate, London, S.W.1.

(⁵) Luz and Bethel (Gen. 12:8, 28:19) now a ruined town eleven miles north of Jerusalem, were so near each other that in the Scriptures Bethel often included the little city of Luz. This Luz must not be confused with a later Luz in the Land of the Hittites. (Judges 1:22-26)

(⁶) *Miracles of History*, Pg. 30.

(⁷) Genesis 48:19. Also *The Coronation Stone* by Major Iain Gordon, *News and Views*, General Motors Acceptance Corp., May, 1937. Pgs. 25, 26.

(⁸) Genesis 48:3-20.

(⁹) *Israel's Migrations* by C. F. Parker, Covenant Pub. Co., Ltd. *Israel's Racial Origins and Migrations*, 1934, by Brig. General W. H. Fasken, C.B., Covenant Pub. Co., Ltd. *Judah's Sceptre and Joseph's Birthright*, Chaps. IX and X, 1913, by J. H. Allen (A. A. Beauchamp Pub., Boston, Mass.), from which much of this source-material has been drawn.

(¹⁰) *Judah's Sceptre and Joseph's Birthright* by J. H. Allen.

(¹¹) Jeremiah 43:7-8, 45:1. *Judah's Sceptre and Joseph's Birthright*, Pgs. 221-225, 248-258. *The Coronation Stone* by Major Iain Gordon, Pgs. 25, 26.

(¹²) *Lug* is Celtic for God and *Aidh*, a house, hence Tea-Tephi is called "The Daughter of God's House."

(¹³) *Brith* derives from the Hebrew, meaning *Covenant*; *ish* means *man*. Combined, *Brith-ish* means "A Covenant Man."

(¹⁴) Authorities agree that the Stone of Destiny reached Eire by way of Celtiberia, but some disagree as to when and by whom it was brought there. Some contend it was brought to Tara, by way of Spain, by Eremon, c. 700 years before Christ, others that it was brought by Jeremiah, c. 570 B.C.

(¹⁵) *Miracles of History* by David Davidson, Pgs. 105-167. *Through World Chaos to Cosmic Christ* by David Davidson, Covenant Pub. Co., Ltd.

THE END



A DRAMA OF LIFE AMONG THE WILD FOLK OF THE HIGH ROCKIES.

by KENNETH GILBERT

Thus in wisdom spake Agur, the son of Jakeh, unto Ithiel, as set forth in the thirtieth chapter of Proverbs: "The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks."

slope a police-whistle shrilled warningly in the pre-dawn hush. But no belted and booted traffic-cop had ever ridden a motorcycle up these awesome steep.

Sitting erect on a slab of shale, the maker of the outsized sound was a rabbit-looking creature hardly eight inches in length, head and shoulders yellowish-brown, the rest grayish-black. Large and round ears, conspicuous whiskers, a thick-set body with no tail, made it understandable why Pika bore such names as rock-rabbit, little chief hare, whistling hare, as well as cony. Neither rabbit nor rat, he belonged to an ancient

THE talus slope at the brink of the precipice, was more than eight thousand feet above sea-level and was blistering hot in the long days of summer, but now in early May drifts still were deep in nearby gorges which the sun reached only at midday. Eastward in a notch of Idaho's jagged Sawtooths a cloud burst into flame, and from the talus

Terror at Timberline

and distinct clan. Feeble though he might be, Pika was a true mountaineer who lived as reckless and rigorous a life as that of his bulky neighbors, the mountain goats and big-horn sheep. Even as they, he scorned to hibernate in winter when terrific blizzards scourged the heights, but survived precariously on arctic-alpine and the leaves of dwarf shrubs which he prudently stored in his rocky fastness in late summer. Now, with spring orce more broken over his high world, he could whistle cheerfully at the prospect of lush days ahead.

Because he was a pygmy, he had many enemies; but he also had wisdom, for he made his home in the rocks. Even as he sat there his small, buttony eyes glimpsed one of these rapacious foes.

HIGH in the paling sky a dot swung in wide, lazy circles. A western goshawk, bound north on his spring migration, had sifted through a mountain pass and had paused for a closer scanning of the rock-slide, for his hunger was great and he long knew that conies were delectable eating.

As the goshawk's telescopic vision punched downward through space, Pika betrayed himself against the gray-brown background by shifting nervously for a better look at the remote killer. The goshawk's wings closed instantly, his streamlined body straightened with every feather in place and hooked beak extended and talons doubled into bony fists that could deliver a knockout blow when backed by near-sonic speed, he shot earthward.

Pika continued to stare at the dot above which grew magically in size. There was something fascinating about the spectacle which kept him frozen, unable to stir. There was no sound, for the air screaming off the hawk's body would not reach his ears until too late. Pika seemed doomed, for the oncoming hawk was now so close that its pale-ruby eyes flamed in triumphant anticipation.

A whistle which exploded close behind him jerked Pika out of the fatal spell. He gave a convulsive leap and went tumbling into the mouth of his den just as the goshawk, with a thin *kee-ee!* of disappointment, braked itself with suddenly outthrust wings. The rock where Pika had squatted was swept by a mighty gust as the goshawk banked, momentum shooting the bird skyward again. Then the bird continued to climb as its wide pinions stroked swiftly, scorning a backward look as though it had never had any interest whatsoever in the little people of the talus slope.

For a long moment Pika remained crouched within the sheltering rocks, beside the mate whose timely warning had saved him. By and by they touched noses affectionately, and perhaps talk passed between them, although they made no sound. Presently the female cony hopped deeper into the maze of passages in the jumbled shale, and Pika followed, for since the cony pair had been blessed with four hairless kits only a few days ago, neither parent would remain away long from these blind and helpless but beautiful babies.

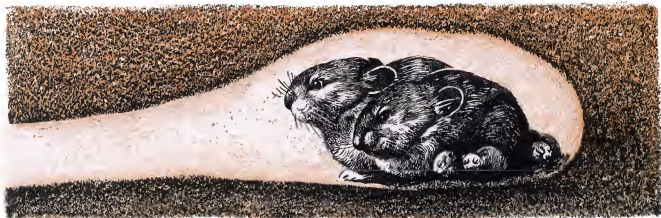
In a cove among the rocks, Pika smelled lovingly of his offspring, who

were already exploring the soft fur of the mother's belly, squeaking with impatient hunger. Then he went deeper into the den, for despite its spaciousness there was always work to be done. Countless generations of conies had implanted in Pika an instinct concerning the dangers of rock-slides.

ALTHOUGH the entrance to his home emerged from the haphazard mass of the slide, its innermost chamber ended in soft earth beneath the talus. Pike understood that in spring, when the ground thawed, even old rockslides will resume their march, crushing any cony hapless enough to be caught between the grinding slabs. But in the soft earth beneath the rock lay security, for the loose mass would merely glide over it.

That danger was great at the moment Pika seemed to understand. Ominous whisperings came from the depths of the talus, and likewise muffled, jarring sounds. From the foot of the slide, where it hung poised at the lip of the gorge, rock-fragments were constantly being pushed over by pressure from above as the sun warmed the slope, and went clattering into the abyss.

Pika set to work briskly, for he and his family needed sanctuary until the slide settled itself for the summer and fastened new grips on the steep incline. He attacked the newly-thawed soil with tiny forepaws on each of which was a rudimentary thumb. For perhaps twenty minutes he worked, pushing the loosened earth behind him into crevices in the rocks, until the burrow was at least





*Too late, the weasel saw
the shadow fall across
the rocks.*

three feet deep. Then he dug out the inner end until it was roomy enough for his entire family. Thereafter he went back to where his mate lay with the kits fast to her dugs, touched noses with her briefly, and hopped to the entrance of the den. His clash with the goshawk forgotten, he wanted another look-see at the fresh spring world after the long and bitter months of winter.

No danger was apparent. Other conies were out to greet the rising sun. As Pika cautiously poked his head from the entrance he was greeted by the friendly whistles of neighbors. At least a dozen of them were on the slide, some erect and watchful as though they were statuesque chiseled from the native rock, while others busily preened their fur in the grateful warmth.

Pika turned his head to scan the sky, but no murderous hawk cruised up there. At the edge of the rock-slide, which at that point was perhaps a hundred yards wide, avalanche-lilies had appeared above-ground, their pale blooms coaxed from the warmed earth. He went toward them, hopping nimbly from rock to rock, his foothold made sure by hairy pads on his feet. There was still food left in his winter storehouse, for he was a good provider, but these

leaves and tough grasses were now so stale and dry as to be hardly worth more than bedding for the kits. Reaching the lily-patch, he ruthlessly snipped off the stem of one matchless flower, sat on haunches and held it with forepaws, nibbling daintily but with relish. He was eating his third avalanche-lily when warning whistles came from back on the slide.

He froze to stillness, surveying the vicinity, but saw nothing alarming. Yet the shrilling went on, each cony echoing the signals of others.

Such warning was not to be ignored. Holding the half-eaten lily between his jaws, Pika started homeward. He was only a few hops from the mouth of his den when he stopped, flattening his body to a rock.

No other conies were now in sight although their muffled whistling still came from the depths of the slide. Pika saw what looked like a white stake upthrust from the rocks near the mouth of his burrow. It looked harmless enough, but Pika recognized one of his most-dreaded foes—a lesser weasel, whose slender, snakey body could penetrate every crevice of the slide. Sitting stiffly as a picket-pin, the small killer still wore its winter coat, and was immaculately white save for its black-tipped tail.

The weasel knew the ways of conies, and when hard-pressed for

food sometimes journeyed to the heights in search of them, particularly in spring when a new crop of babies offered easy and succulent prey. All it had to do now was to locate one of the dens—rather a difficult thing to do by smelling them out, for the slightly acrid rodent-taint was everywhere in the rocks and it would take considerable time to explore the entire slide. The problem was suddenly made simple as the weasel spotted Pika. The cony would instinctively head for home, thereby revealing the hiding-place of the kits. Looping its long body, the weasel charged straight at the terror-stricken Pika.

The latter took flight instantly, diving into the shale, but as he twisted this way and that between the jumbled rocks the light pattering of pursuit never ceased. The weasel was quicker and faster and no opening large enough to admit Pika's body balked the white slayer for an instant.

In his panic, Pika apparently forgot all about the fancied security of his den, for he turned and headed for the open, hoping to win in a straightaway race across the slide. But as he plunged into sunlight he caught a glimpse of the white nemesis close behind, and in desperation he shot into an opening, veered sharply

and almost reversed his course before emerging once more.

Yet the pathetic ruse never fooled the weasel for a moment, and the gap between him and his prey closed rapidly. Pika would sate the weasel's hunger for a time, and the cony's den could be searched out later. Just as Pika appeared again above the rocks scarcely four feet distant, the weasel shot through air like a white arrow aimed for the cony's throat. But the leap somehow fell short, and too late, then, the weasel saw the shadow fall across the rocks and heard a faint humming from above.

There was a thudding impact; then the weasel was writhing and squalling in anguish as sharp talons pierced his snowy coat and a hooked beak slashed through his tender flesh. The goshawk rose easily, scarcely noticing the slight weight of his victim, and headed back to a ledge high above the slide, from which vantage-point he had been studying the doings of the cony colony since his humiliating failure. Sitting moveless up there, he had appeared to be part of the rock itself and therefore unseen while he bided opportunity. Disposing of his meal with a few deft strokes of his beak and rending talons, the goshawk presently took off on his northward migration.

But for a long while thereafter silence lay heavily upon the rock-slide, and not by sight nor sound was there indication that the place had ever known life.

Deep within the slide, Pika crouched in fear, every faculty attuned to detect the stalk of his blood-

thirsty foe, for he had not witnessed the weasel's end. Elsewhere the other conies remained on the alert, trying to anticipate the next move of the destroyer they believed to be still among them. But as time passed their confidence returned, for their memories were short. Gradually they resumed their myriad cony affairs—yet the slide was baking in the full strength of mid-afternoon sunlight before the colonists reappeared and began calling back and forth with questioning whistles.

By then Pika had recovered from his fright and had sought his mate and kits. She had already moved them to the new chamber which her lord had provided. With the babies sleeping soundly in a disorderly heap, she followed Pika outside as he led her to the toothsome avalanche-lilies. There the cony pair fed contentedly until the sun edged the western skyline; then the mother returned to her brood. But Pika fed on, even after other conies with whom he had been grudgingly sharing the lily-patch had likewise departed. The early chill of coming night in the high country had arrived and Pika, his rounded belly dragging the ground, was about to turn homeward when he heard the rattle of a rock dislodged behind him.

Despite his gorged heaviness he gave a leap that carried him out of the lily-patch just as a heavy paw

smashed the spot where he had been an instant before.

Pika leaped again, dodging the paw as it struck at him once more. Then he was darting about erratically, trying to escape thudding impacts which followed swiftly. Suddenly he was clear, hopping madly toward the shelter of the slide and his den. A coughing grunt behind sped him onward.

THE old Sawtooth grizzly had ended his hibernation three days before and was hungry for meat, even such insipid fare as cony-flesh. When he quitted his cave in the valley below the slide he had eaten copiously of whatever green stuff he could find. Not until the violent purge took effect had he bethought himself of more solid food.

In times past the remains of winter avalanches had supplied occasional meals, for even such surefooted crag-masters as mountain goats and big-horns were sometimes trapped and swept to death when a snowfield gave way suddenly and engulfed them. But the grizzly had found no goats or sheep this spring, and he had turned his attention to lesser game. Ground-squirrels, marmots, even mice were not beneath his notice at all times, and many times he had laboriously dug them out, never hesitating to move a ton or so of dirt and loose rock in order to capture some small

*Illustrated by
Carl Burger*



The weasel knew the ways of the conies.

creature which scarcely meant a mouthful to him. A colony of conies was good hunting.

Pika whistled warning and dived into his den, a warning in cony language that the most fearsome enemy of all was among them. Cony instinct, transmitted through many generations, said that at least several of the small colonists would die when a grizzly bear discovered them, for his strength and persistence would unlock their most secret hiding-places. Excitedly Pika kept whistling even when deep beneath the rocks.

The grizzly moved forward deliberately, nowise discouraged at his failure to stalk Pika and crush him among the avalanche-lilies. The bear stuck his nose into the rocks and breathed deeply of the cony-scent, and then went to work.

A slab of shale weighing at least a hundred and fifty pounds was up-ended easily and sent sliding downward until it vanished over the lip of the cliff. As it slithered away before disappearing, the slide itself quaked under the impact, but held fast. Removal of the slab enabled the grizzly to thrust his nose deeper into the twisting tunnel where he had seen Pika vanish, and he drank deeply of the warm body-scent of the conies cowering below. The grizzly grunted as he dislodged another boulder, bigger even than the first. The tremendous strength which lay in his huge body made his efforts seem easy.

Soon the spot where the grizzly labored was pocked by a sizable crater, but Pika and his family were still out of reach. The bear smelled them and knew he was getting closer. The fact that he was being compelled to move tons of shale for a brief meal apparently was not illogical to him; perhaps he enjoyed feeling his power.

The cony family was trapped. Pika and his mate and babies were deep in the new tunnel, with no opportunity to dart away among the rocks unless they came out of the shaft and risked getting within one of the bear's pile-driver paws. Pika and his mate huddled close together and waited, their bodies shielding the kits.

Dreadful sounds came from above—jarring noises as hunks of rock were dragged loose and tossed aside, the grunting of the bear as he labored, the trembling of the earth which sent vague whisperings of apprehension through the slide. Now the grizzly stood almost on his head, only his rump showing above the crater as he tugged at a triangular piece of shale half-embedded in the soil. Beyond this were no more rocks to be moved; only soft clay would lie between him and the conies, and a few strokes of his forefeet would scoop out the final barrier.

But the slab was set more solidly than others had been, and required the grizzly's best effort. He hooked both forepaws around it and humped his body, muscles bunched and knotted until he seemed contorted out of shape. With a creaking sound the slab came free from another slab pinching it. In chain-reaction other sounds followed.

There was a succession of dull clicks as other rocks, pressure released, slipped and fell; then a rustling which swelled to a threatening roar, and suddenly the whole rock-mass was in motion in a cataclysmic sweep toward the cliff-edge.

Riding it like a swimmer on the crest of a wave, the bewildered grizzly sought to make his way to solid ground, but the swift-changing flow of the rock-river gave him no footing. He fell heavily as pieces went out from under him, but was up again instantly, moving with agility surprising in a beast his size. He was within a few feet of the edge of the slide and safety when fresh disaster struck.

The slide had started halfway up the slope. As the mass broke loose there was nothing left to sustain the upper part, and now this descended like a second tidal wave. The forefront of it caught the grizzly and tossed him like a chip, then rolled over him and went on to pour over the brink in a terrifying cascade that made the ground quake.

It lasted no more than a few seconds, yet echoes fled among the peaks much longer, fading remotely. In the half-light the face of the slope appeared changed. Here and there rock-fragments remained, but the slide itself was gone and the freshly-scored earth lay wet and naked. By contrast to the awful thundering, silence was an oppressive thing which bore down relentlessly.

THE grizzly was gone too, and so, perhaps, were several of the colonists. But Pika and his family were safe, although their refuge now was no more than a shallow pocket which the slide had barely scraped over. A little digging would break down the wall of earth packed firmly into the mouth of the tunnel.

Soon the kits would be big enough to be moved, for another slide must be found and a new home established. The colonists would endure despite the foes always searching them out.

They would survive as they had survived throughout the long centuries. Even as a Hebrew scribe two thousand years ago saw in their persistence an example of how mankind may find security in the fortress of unshakable faith, the feeble conies would wisely "make they their houses in the rocks."

THE END

Arms and the Woman

X

FLORA SANDES, an Englishwoman, went to Serbia as a nurse, then joined the Serbian infantry as a private; was wounded, and rose to commissioned rank.

by FAIRFAX DOWNEY

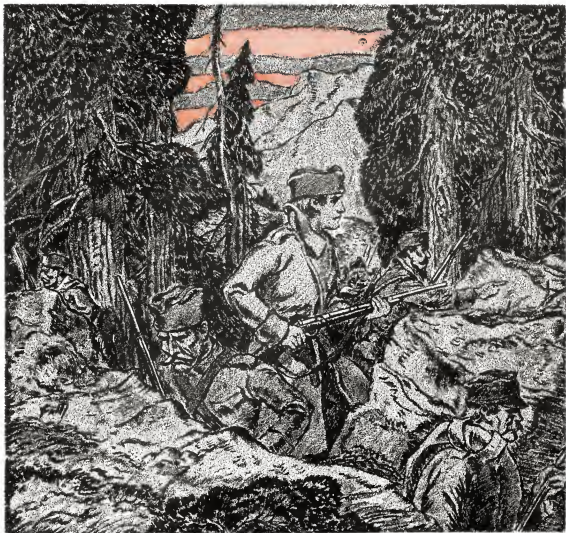
IT took high courage in the Florence Nightingale tradition to serve as a nurse in the dreadful typhus epidemic that ravaged Serbia at the beginning of the First World War. Flora Sandes, a young Englishwoman with a British hospital unit, possessed that valor along with another sort of daring, rarer in her sex. For after taking the fever herself and recovering, she unpinned her Red Cross badge and joined the 2nd Serbian Infantry as a private.

At first the Serbs accepted her as a mascot and fondly called her "our Englishwoman"; but Flora, who could ride and shoot, soon showed she could be considered no mere symbol and supernumerary. She took her place in the line with her platoon during the desperate retreat during which the Serbian Army was driven through the mountains by the triumphant Bulgars, and she stood fire like a veteran, and endured long marches and bitter cold.

A few concessions only Flora made to her woman's strength: Instead of a rifle she carried a lighter carbine, and at times she accepted a ride on the colonel's spare charger and a meal at the officers' mess. Comrades shouldered her heavier equipment. A six-foot-four sergeant appointed himself her bodyguard, and a little private volunteered as her batman. But Flora manned her share of water-filled trench and held it, though men were killed at her side when the Bulgars, following their barracks, attacked with grenade and bayonet.

Like any soldier she learned that inaction under shellfire is tougher to endure than actual combat. She knew the desperation of constant re-

*Illustrated
by Charles
B. Falls*



treat and desperate rearguard fighting where the devil took the hindmost, for the Bulgars cut the throats of Serb prisoners. Flora was decorated for gallantry and promoted to corporal.

At long last the tide turned. The Serbs fought their way back, with the fleeing Bulgars calling frantically on their German masters for help. When a heavy attack was being mounted, Flora, now a sergeant, was ordered to report to her colonel who, speaking to her in German, told her to go to the rear for a rest, since the regiment for a time would only be guarding communications. Turning aside, he said in Serbian to one of his aides: "You know we are going straight into the thick of it, and it's such a pity for her to get killed. I'd like to keep her out of it."

The colonel, unaware how much of his language Flora had picked up, was startled when the young woman told him resolutely in his own tongue that she would stay with her men.

Sergeant Sandes charged with her platoon when Serbian troops stormed a Bulgar-held hill under a hail of machine-gun and rifle fire. Mist, which had given some protection, lifted to reveal an enemy counter-attack. On-

rushing Bulgars, only ten yards away, hurled grenades, and Flora dropped in a blinding crash of flame. She lay stunned in no man's land until under cover of night her lieutenant crawled forward and dragged her back by the leg. Next morning, when the Serbs advanced again, ten of Flora's comrades were found near the spot where she had fallen—with their throats slashed.

As soon as Flora recovered from a smashed right arm and numerous splinter wounds, she left the hospital and returned to the front. But there were still too many steel fragments in her body, and she was forced to return to England for treatment and recuperation. Once on her feet again, Sergeant Major Sandes, trim in her uniform was received by the Queen. The rest of her furlough she spent raising money and supplies for her beloved Serbs and then hurried back to duty.

When she discovered that all the other sergeant-majors in her regiment had been made lieutenants, Flora vehemently protested being passed over. The "brass" hesitated a bit. There were other woman noncoms, Serb girls, in the army, but a woman officer

would be highly radical. Flora's application went straight up to Prince Alexander. Promptly the royal pen signed her commission.

After the war Lieutenant Sandes served on with the peacetime army. In white tunic, breeches and boots, vizored cap set firm over her close-clipped hair, she drilled her platoon, never resorting to a "Carry on, Sergeant." Once she had to confront an armed soldier, running amok on a drunken spree. She faced him boldly, told him he was under arrest. The crazed man leveled his rifle at her heart and was about to fire when recognition pierced his fogged brain. "Our Englishwoman!" he shouted, dropped his gun and marched off to the guardhouse.

Flora Sandes retired after four years of service of which she declared, "I never loved anything so much in my life." Back in Britain, she found that "turning from soldier to ordinary woman was like losing everything at one fell swoop, and trying to find bearings again in another life and an entirely different world." But the Serbs did not forget a comrade-in-arms. They carried her on the army list, and in 1926 she was gazetted a captain.



It took P. T. all of his evenings the first week to lug his bottles to the back room of Keeler and Whitlock's store.

The

A memorable story from the boyhood of one of the most colorful characters America ever produced—Phineas Taylor Barnum.

by

CAROL BRINK

He picked his way carefully along the edge of the lane because he did not wish to ruin them, before they were paid for, in the muddy ruts caused by yesterday's rain. As he walked, he drew in deep breaths of the keen September air, and, at the same time he figured ways and means, he was not insensible to the poetry of scarlet autumn leaf and misty blue hillside which surrounded him.

The boy was not tall but he radiated cocksure self-confidence to such an extent that people were apt to consider him both older and taller than he really was. He had a large head on his shoulders, and wide-set eyes which danced and shone in a plain, square face with a wide good-natured mouth.

He was not a great reader, but certain tales of his now-discarded childhood often returned to him. He had taken delight in all tales of the strange and wonderful, and his active mind had been able to conjure up vivid pictures of the giants, the dwarfs, the seven-league boots, the hairy old men of the sea, the geni stopped up in bottles and the various freaks and curiosities of folklore.

Now as he walked toward Grassy Plain with all of his future before him, it occurred to him that most of his favorite tales began with a funeral and a youth setting out to make his fortune in the great world. Some of the youths in the tales had had more stock-in-trade to start with than had P. Taylor Barnum. There was the boy, Jack, for instance, who started out to sell his widowed mother's cow and traded it instead, for a handful of wonderful beans. Everyone had said he was lazy and a fool, but what with the beans and the giants and the singing harp and the hen that laid the golden eggs, Jack's trade had turned out to be a great thing in the end.

PHINEAS TAYLOR BARNUM, at the age of fifteen, in a pair of shoes which he had bought on trust, walked the mile between Bethel and Grassy Plain, Connecticut, and viewed his future. Although he had been earning the money for his own clothing since he was ten and had been contributing for several years to the support of his father's family, he found himself on the day of his father's funeral without a cent in his pocket. He had several promissory notes that his father had written out for him at times when the boy's earnings went into the bottomless family fund, but now it turned out that notes given to a minor were invalid and that what he had lent to his father belonged to the estate.

He could not quarrel with his mother over money which she badly needed to help support the four younger children; on the other hand, he felt no obligation to continue helping her. Now that a somewhat muddled and ineffectual husband was laid to rest, everyone knew that Mrs. Barnum

would make a success of the tavern which Philo Barnum had barely kept going. The Taylors were like that. Grandpa Phineas Taylor ran with energy, enthusiasm and much good humor a half-dozen enterprises in Bethel, ranging from a carriage business to the selling of lottery tickets, and his daughter had inherited more of his business ability than was usually considered seemly in a poor widowed female in 1825.

"You'll earn your way fast enough, Taylor," she said to her son. "You've always been sharper at getting money than your poor papa was. You can continue to clerk in Mr. Weed's store, and I'll let you live at the tavern and charge you just as little for your board and room as I can."

"No ma'am," Taylor said, "you'll be better off with me out of your way. I'll see to myself and give you no cause for worry."

They looked at each other with mutual respect, and, if the widow's son did not waste a great deal of pity on his mother, it was equally true that she wasted none on him.

The boots which Mr. Weed had given to Phineas Taylor Barnum on account creaked agreeably as he walked.

Widow's Son

Illustrated by
JOHN FULTON

These reflections were pleasant to P. T. and he fell to whistling as he went along. He had been called lazy and a fool, too, before he was fourteen and while he was flitting from one occupation to another, preferring to use his wits instead of his muscles. His father had finally settled him into Mr. Weed's store in Bethel and hoped to make a steady clerk out of him. In Mr. Weed's store he had been well trained in the sharp practice of barter and trade, for in those days as much goods as money was taken in over the counter. The countrywomen brought in butter, eggs, beeswax and feathers to exchange for shawls and bonnets, and the men brought oats, corn, buckwheat, home-turned axe-helves, beaver skins for the making of hats and bundles of rags to trade for ten-penny nails, molasses or New England rum.

THEIR trading was not all honest either, and young Barnum had seen the grain turn out to be several bushels short of the stipulated amount; or a bundle of rags that was weighed up and taken in exchange for groceries, produce a center of gravel or ashes when it was cut open. If he were reasonably sure of the gravel center, the clerk might be justified in giving a short weight of nails or molasses or rum and still call himself an honest man as he sat on a front pew in meeting of a Sunday morning.

It took sharp wits and a sense of humor to be a successful Yankee trader, and P. T. was completely confident that he could hold his own with the best.

Just as he had reached this comforting conclusion, he came over the top of a hill and his attention was caught by a large cart mired down in the slough below him. The driver of the cart was belaboring his horse, but the animal was old and ill-fed and put small heart into the struggle. P. T. came down the hill and stood watching for a moment, all of his interest actively engaged. The September rains had swollen a small stream out of its bed and for twenty feet or so had made a fine morass of the road bed. The cart was heavily laden with green glass bottles that shone in the watery sunshine like a heap of bubbles from Neptune's palace. From just

such a one of these green glass bottles might have come the genie of the folklore tales.

"Take hold there, if you please," said the carter. "You better use your shoulder than your eyes."

"Wait a bit," said P. T. He took off his boots and set them on top of a stone wall, rolled up his pantaloons, stepped gingerly into the mire and

put his shoulder to the back of the cart.

"Heave away now," yelled the carter, cracking his whip. The horse made an heroic lunge, and P. T. pushed with all his might. There was a creaking and groaning of the heavy cart as it began to stir, followed by a sharp sound of cracking and splintering, and instead of going forward, the load began to settle backward into the mud.

He could see their mouths working as they spelled out his sign.



"Dad blast it!" screamed the carter, and from there he went on to a number of other more specific oaths.

"You've broke your axle," P. T. pointed out. This reasonable bit of information seemed to incite the carter to even greater flights of invective, which only confirmed young Barnum's settled conviction that cussing was an awful waste of time. He stood and waited for a moment of silence, then he said: "How much'll you take for that load of bottles?"

"Take?" shouted the driver. "I'd sell it for a shilling."

Instinctively P. T. put his hand in his pocket, but he knew as well that there was nothing there as he knew that the carter would not really sell for a shilling.

"You wouldn't take a nice new pair of boots, I s'pose?" he ventured. The carter continued to look at him in a state of fury which made him incapable of entertaining a reasonable offer.

"Them bottles!" he cried. "I been dragging them through muck and mire for two weeks now. You s'pose anybody wants to buy them? No! Seems like folks don't need no bottles in this

country. And now I've broke my axle!"

"What you have to do," said P. T., "you have to make folks want whatever it is you got to sell."

"I don't know how you're going to do that," replied the carter irritably as he began unhitching the horse, "without they don't set their minds to it in the first place."

"Look here," said P. T., "the axle isn't broke clear through. I'll help you get that load of bottles out on the roadside, and I reckon you can drive your cart as far as the smithy in Grassy Plain if the cart's empty."

"And what'll I do with my bottles, then?"

"You can come back for them when you get you a new axle, or you can trade them to me for a good new pair of boots. Look at your own now."

THE carter cast his eyes downward to where his spattered ankles disappeared in four or five inches of mire. He had jumped down off the cart without a thought of his old rawhide boots.

"They won't fit me," he declared with settled pessimism.

"Try 'em," Barnum said. He held out the shiny new shoes that had not yet been paid for. "Bought for a funeral—only wore one day."

The carter was tempted. He walked over into the field, where the water of the stream was clearer, and washed off enough mud so that he was able



to undo the rawhide laces of his old boots. The new ones were a nice fit.

"You don't look big enough to wear them shoes," the carter said to Barnum. The boy laughed.

"I'm not very big, but I got me a lot turned up for feet."

The carter took the new shoes off and set them back carefully upon the wall.

"Help me out with them bottles. I'll be making up my mind."

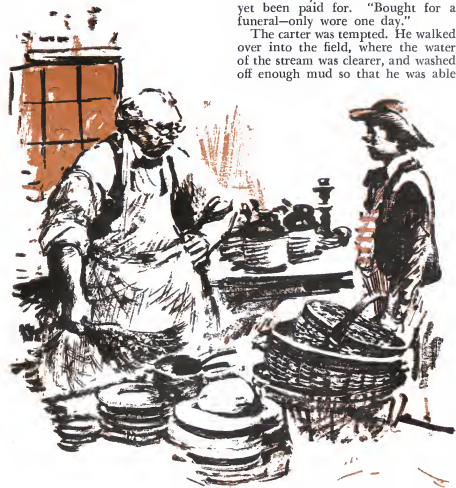
When they had transferred the contents of the cart into a glittering green heap by the wayside, the carter had made up his mind.

"All right, bub," he said, "I'll take them boots of yours, and you can have the bottles, but the Lord only knows what you can do with them."

P. T. Barnum saw the boots go into the empty cart, the man mount the horse and ride away with the disabled cart wobbling and creaking along behind. From his jacket pocket he took a stub of a pencil and the small Testament which his mother had given him to keep him in the straight and narrow path. He disliked putting the Testament to its first use in this way, but he had no other paper, so he tore out the flyleaf and wrote on it:

*These bottles belong to
P. T. BARNUM.
Anyone who molests them
will be persecuted.*

He anchored this notice with two stones, and, casting a fond backward glance at his green, glittering treas-



"Ah, Mr. Whitlock, I'm Phineas Taylor Barnum, sir, and I'll be glad to start now if you care to have me."

"P.T., I see the most uncommon thing today. I see a four-legged chicken."



ure, he began to walk barefooted into Grassy Plain.

The general store of James S. Keeler and Lewis Whitlock in Grassy Plain was clothed in the somnolent silence of a late afternoon. Uncle Bibbens, a Revolutionary pensioner of uncertain years, sat in a chair made out of a barrel and spat thoughtfully at the stove. Keeler was out, and Whitlock was ruefully dusting the almost worthless stock of cheap tinware which they had laid in during the summer with the hope that its cheapness might stimulate trade. Mr. Whitlock did not like to dust, and he had not done so for several months. Ever since they had put the card "Boy Wanted" in the window, Mr. Whitlock had confidently expected that Heaven would send them a boy before the dust got an eighth of an inch thicker. But today he had finally set to work with a turkey wing, and now his occasional sneezing together with the periodic hiss of tobacco juice on hot metal was the only sound that broke the silence.

Then quite suddenly the little bell over the door jangled violently, the door banged open; a flood of fresh, crystal-clear air rushed in, catching a

tin pan off a shelf and slamming it noisily on the floor; and a boy with bare feet stood there and greeted Mr. Whitlock with as much confidence as if he had been shod in the best leather.

"Mr. Keeler, I suppose?"

"No, Whitlock," said the wielder of the turkey wing with a sneeze.

"Ah, Mr. Whitlock, I'm Phineas Taylor Barnum, sir, and I'd be glad to start now if you care to have me."

"Start what?" asked Whitlock irritably.

"Why, the dusting, sir, if you'll let me have the turkey wing."

Whitlock found to his surprise that he had relinquished the turkey wing before he roared, "What in thunder do you want?"

"I saw the sign. I thought you wanted a boy."

"Well, we do."

"Then all we have to do is arrange the terms, ain't it? I'm looking for a job."

"Not so fast, fellow. What's your name—Fin—fin—"

"Barnum's the name," said the boy; "just call me P.T. I've been working for Mr. Weed in Bethel. He thinks well enough of me to trust me with a pair of shoes."

"A pair of shoes, eh? You don't seem to have them on you."

"No sir, I traded them for a load of green glass bottles just now, and that's where you come in, sir."

"Me?" said Mr. Whitlock rather dubiously.

"Yes, sir, because I'm going to let you in on one of the sweetest little deals that you've had in a long time, sir."

"Me?" repeated Mr. Whitlock with singular lack of originality, and he topped it off with a sneeze.

"Pardon me, sir, but you shouldn't have been dusting, sir, should you? It's a touch of hay fever you've got. After this I'll take complete charge of the dusting, and the window-dressing, too, sir. There's a dead mouse in the window with the sign. Did you know, sir?"



A chicken, roosting on the back of one of her chairs!

"No!" shouted Mr. Whitlock. He went outside and peered through the small panes of glass. The boy was right. A mouse had given up the ghost through a dusty bolt of speckled calico and a bridle trimmed with glass bull's-eyes.

"You won't mind if I say so, sir, but that discourages folks from coming in to buy, I think," said the barefoot boy at Mr. Whitlock's elbow. "What folks want is change, something new and curious to look at. Now, if you was to put a little red jacket and a pair of pantaloons on the mouse, you'd get a crowd—"

"Take it out," roared Mr. Whitlock. Uncle Bibbens was interested by this time.

"You say you got a mouse in pantaloons?" he inquired, shuffling over to look. P. T. removed the mouse from the back of the window.

"Cute little feller," he said. "You don't want to reconsider the idea of the jacket and pantaloons, Mr. Whitlock?"

"Put it in the stove," said Mr. Whitlock irritably, "and what's this business about a load of bottles?"

"Green," said P. T.; "they're pretty as you ever saw when the sun shines on them. We'll make a nice thing out of them, Mr. Whitlock. They'll bring in trade."

"And what do you propose I do about it, mister?" asked the merchant sarcastically.

"Well, what do you calculate to pay your boy, Mr. Whitlock?"

"Six dollars a month and board."

"That's fair enough," said P. T., "but if I come, I'd like to bring my bottles too. I'll give you half the proceeds, Mr. Whitlock, if you'll let me sell 'em over your counter."

"Bottles!" cried Mr. Whitlock. "How do you expect to sell bottles? Look at all that pretty tinware standing there these months, and have we sold it? No!"

Young Barnum ran his eyes over the shelves of tinware.

"Tinware—h'm," he said. "Bottles and tinware. If I give you half the proceeds of the bottles and sell your tinware too, Mr. Whitlock—what would you say to that? Can I have the job?"

"I'll try you for a week or two, P. T. If you are worth your salt, we'll find it out by then."

Without a horse and cart, it took P. T. all of his evenings and most of Sunday of the first week to lug his bottles from the pile by the slough to the back room of Keeler and Whitlock's store.

He found lodging with Mrs. Jerusha Wheeler, "Aunt Rushia" as the neighbors called her, a woman who kept an

ample board and gave her boarders a pleasant feeling that they had come home to roost when they found her house. Aunt Rushia took one look at P. T.'s feet and found him a pair of her deceased husband's boots that were not too bad a fit.

As soon as he could, P. T. removed the tangle of calico and harness, rope and faded ribbon from Keeler and Whitlock's windows, brushed up the dust and desiccated flies, and gave the people of Grassy Plain the shock of their lives by substituting fresh goods. He replaced the "Boy Wanted" sign by one of his own rather painful manufacture, which read:

Jugs are out of Fashion
For a fresh sparkling bevridge
Put your cider into bottles.

The sign was flanked by several green glass bottles, washed and polished until they shone quite pleasantly. Watching from inside the store, he had the satisfaction of seeing that everybody who went up or down the street stopped at Keeler & Whitlock's renovated windows and looked in. He could see their mouths working as they spelled out the words of his sign. Some of them passed on, but many came into the store and bought a yard of cheesecloth or a paper of peppercorns or a pound of nails or even a pattern of calico.

Polite and watchful behind the counter, P. T. wound up the order by inquiring:

"And how about a green glass bottle?"

"Jugs is good enough for me," seemed to be the consensus of opinion.

Now, Mr. Keeler, who had not been a party to the hiring of P. T., began to complain with some bitterness about the clutter of bottles in the shed behind the store.

"Them blankety-you-know-what bottles is going to be on our hands just like this tinware. We'll be cracking our shins against 'em for the rest of our lives. Whitlock, I don't know how you ever let that young fool talk you into giving 'em shed-space."

"Well, he's a purty talker," Mr. Whitlock said, "but, by gum, out them bottles go if he don't sell them soon. What say, P. T.?"

"I'm a-workin' on it," P. T. said.

Aunt Rushia had a nice potpie for supper that night, but P. T. did not tuck into it with his usual vigor. His flow of oratory, which kept the boarders gaping while he helped himself to the extra piece of cake or pie, was stilled. P. T. was in the glooms. Looking at him fondly, Aunt Rushia sought for some intellectual tidbit to divert her latest boarder.

"P. T., I see the most uncommon thing today. I see a four-legged chicken."

P. T.'s eyes came around to her with widest incredulity.

"Four legs?" he said. "A chicken?"

"Two on the ground and two more bity ones a-hanging down behind," she said triumphantly. "Eat now, your supper's turning cold."

"Where?" demanded P. T.

"My cousin Arly's got it. They don't know what to do with it. Should they kill it, they fear 'twill poison the pot. 'Use a little extr'y onion and marjoram,' I said; 'you'll never recollect it was a monster.' But they can't bring themselves to bring its neck."

P. T. got up from the table.

"How far's your cousin Arly live?"

"Now, listen. You set and eat your supper, laddie."

"I lost my appetite, Aunt Rushia," said P. T.

"Go on," Aunt Rushia said, "I never thought your vitals was that queasy, honey. It's only a chicken after all—and if it's got four legs—"

"Where does your cousin Arly live?"

Reluctantly Aunt Rushia told him, and, in a moment she was folding up P. T.'s disordered napkin and scraping the contents of his abandoned plate into the waiting swill pail, while P. T. streaked off without his cap or muffler in the direction of Cousin Arly's. The only thing he had stopped for was a particularly large and showy green glass bottle which he carried away with him under one arm.

It was long after dark when P. T. returned. There was a bulge under his coat where the green glass bottle had been, but it was not shaped like a bottle. He went with haste and secrecy up to his room.

"You want I should fix you some bread and milk, P. T.?" Aunt Rushia called. If P. T. answered, Aunt Rushia could not understand what he said, for the sound that came from his direction was more like a squawking than like speaking.

Waking in the middle of the night, Aunt Rushia saw the light of P. T.'s candle reflected from his window that was above hers, onto the side of the woodshed opposite. P. T. was not asleep. In the morning he did not appear for breakfast, and, when she went to waken him, she found him gone. She saw to her horror that a chicken had been roosting on the back of one of her chairs, and that it had left its tracks in the dust on the floor. The tracks did not simply go in twos—they went in fours, and the hindmost two were bity ones. . . .

When from opposite directions Keeler and Whitlock approached the store that morning to unlock the door and prepare for what business might ultimately come dawdling in, they were surprised to see that a consider-

able knot of people had already gathered around the front window of the store. Forgetting for the moment that they were the proprietors of the establishment, Keeler and Whitlock joined the crowd and stretched their necks to see what was attracting so much attention.

The window had been stripped of merchandise, and the floor of it covered with sawdust. In one corner was a bowl of water, in the other a dish of their best chickfeed. Ambling around with a melancholy air was a half-grown, yellow chicken. Someone had tied jaunty red bows of ribbon around the neck of the chicken and around each of its legs. And Keeler and Whitlock noted, with a slight rising and pricking of the hair along the tops of their heads, that there were five bows of red ribbon. They looked at each other with glassy eyes, and then back again at the window. In the center of the window was a large sign which asked a question in inch-high letters:

ARE YOU A FOUR-LEGGED CHICKEN?

Keeler and Whitlock looked at each other and automatically shook their

heads. Their eyes returned to the sign.

If *You Are Not*, it said in somewhat smaller letters, *Come in and spend 15c for the opportunity of a lifetime. 551 valuable prizes.*

Mr. Whitlock's hand began to fumble in his pocket for a nickel and a dime, but, happening to encounter the keys to the store instead, he drew them out with an oath, and started to elbow his way through the crowd to the front entrance. Mr. Keeler had the same idea, and, as they bent over the lock their heads collided with a smart crack.

At the same instant the door opened from the inside, and P. T., who had his own key to the back door, stood there smiling proudly.

"Don't crowd, folks," he said. "We're prepared to take care of all of you." He looked happy and triumphant but a little wan, for he had missed two meals and spent the night manufacturing handmade lottery tickets like the ones his Grandpa Taylor got the printer to prepare. "Just a little patience, folks, and each shall have his turn," he said.

Whitlock and Keeler were borne forward in the surge of the crowd.

*"I've got a big appetite;
I'll take all four drumsticks."*



They saw that the notions and bolts of calico, which usually cluttered the first counter, had been removed to a rear shelf. The counter was cleared for action, except for a box of lottery tickets, a money till, and another sign which listed the "551 valuable prizes."

First prize, \$25 worth of goods to be selected by the winner from anything in our stock

50 prizes of \$5 each in goods to be selected by the management

100 prizes of \$1 each—ditto

100 prizes of 50c each—ditto

300 prizes of 25c each—ditto

"Twenty-five dollars!" Uncle Bibbens said. "That would buy me enough terebacy to see me on to my heavenly home."

"Twenty-five dollars!" said Mrs. Corphy Donahue. "A new bonnet and a red cashmere shawl!"

"Twenty-five dollars!" Hefty Holcomb said. "A barr'l of crackers, a side of smoked pork, an' a hogshhead of lasses!"

THE gambling fever had begun to rage among these early comers, and two small boys on the outskirts of the crowd rushed forth to spread the tidings. "They're giving out goods at Keeler and Whitlock's. All you got to do is buy a chance." Everybody was hopeful and pleased, except James S. Keeler and Lewis Whitlock. Speechless at first from surprise and shock, Keeler found his voice at last and let out a roar of rage. Whitlock in a stupor continued to stare in silent consternation. "Four legs," he murmured to himself. "It had four legs."

"Step right up, folks," P. T. was saying. "Buy your chances now. This great opportunity ain't going to last forever. These tickets are going to go like hot cakes."

Mr. Keeler's roar was punctuated by the sharp, bright sound of dimes and nickels dropping into the money till.

"I'll take four chances while I'm at it," Mrs. Corphy Donahue said. "Four times fifteen is 60 cents, ain't it, P. T.? And Keeler, if you'll have the goodness to stand behind the counter and wait on me, I'll just buy me

a card of hooks and eyes and a poke of peppermints while I'm in the store."

Keeler and Whitlock had never done a more rushing business than they did that day—not only in lottery tickets but in general merchandise which customers happened to remember needing while they were in the store. They were kept too busy to worry during the day, and, after the store closed, they were also kept busy counting up the day's receipts. But at last Keeler got out a piece of paper and began to reckon up the amount of merchandise which P. T. had promised the public to give away.

"Five hundred dollars!" he howled. "P. T., how dast you give away five hundred dollars' worth of our goods? You ain't a partner, are you?"

"Not yet," P. T. said, "but remember I've agreed to give you half the proceeds from my green glass bottles, Mr. Keeler."

"Green glass bottles!" roared Keeler.

"And get rid of your tinware for you, too," said P. T.

"Bottles! Tinware! Whitlock, did you hire this fellow?"

"Four legs," muttered Mr. Whitlock feebly.

"Now listen," said P. T., "you've done a rushing business all day long. I swear to goodness, you've already took in a twenty-five-dollar profit, and we'll keep the lottery going as long as folks will buy tickets. Now, it's true you got to give the first-prize winner twenty-five dollars in goods of his own choosing; but look how neat I fixed it on the other 550 chances. 'Selected by the management,' the sign says, and there, Mr. Whitlock, sir, is where you get rid of all the tarnal old goods you been harboring in this store since Noah landed with his Ark. You give away for \$5 prizes those cane-bottomed chairs that tip over backward so easy, those blankets that smell of kerosene, those green plush tintype albums that never took the public fancy—"

"But is it honest?" Mr. Keeler faltered.

"A genuine cane-bottomed chair for an investment of 15c? A real good blanket that only needs washing and hanging in the sun to air, for a 15c lottery ticket? Go on, Mr. Keeler!



What religion was you brung up in, if that's not honest?"

"And the other five hundred prizes?"

Mr. Keeler inquired.

"Bottles and tinware!" cried P. T. happily. "Bottles and tinware, man!"

"A lottery!" Mr. Keeler said. "I never thought to see the day when

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Keeler and Whitlock would condone a lottery."

"But did you see their faces?" asked Mr. Whitlock unexpectedly. "They looked right happy, Keeler, and excited."

P. T. smiled dreamily. "To make folks happy," he said, "—and us a little profit!"

Outside the window faces were still pressed to look in. "A four-legged chicken!" they said. "And Keeler and Whitlock a-giving out prizes!"

Well, Grassy Plain had a lively week. It was like an old-fashioned regimental muster day or a county fair. Folks rode in a-horseback from all the farms around to spend 15c for a chance on one of the 551 prizes and to do their trading at Keeler and Whitlock's. They even came from Bethel and the neighboring towns. The word went from mouth to mouth:

"A four-legged chicken—and 551 prizes give away."

On the day of the final drawing of numbers, whole families came with picnic lunches; young men and girls, who had only exchanged smiles before or looked at the backs of each other's heads in church, became very much better acquainted; old folks, who hadn't seen each other for years, met and shook hands; the children chased each other around and around the village square and whooped with joy.

P. T. saw with pleasure what his hand had wrought. He saw that losers did not mind too much, for they had had their fifteen cents' worth of suspense and fun. He saw that Keeler and Whitlock had done a vast volume of new business, as well as clearing their shelves of old goods, and in his pocket he jingled with satisfaction his share of the lottery money.

*"To make folks happy—
and us a little profit."*

When the lottery was all over, and things had begun to quiet down, so that Whitlock and P. T. could keep up with the flow of customers while Keeler went to the city to buy new goods, P. T. said to Aunt Rushia:

"Aunt Rushia, if I was to give you a nice fat fryer, fed on our best chick-feed, would you let me take my pick of the choicest parts?"

"That I would, duckie," Aunt Rushia said. "You could have breast, liver or thigh, whichever suits you best."

"I've got a big appetite," P. T. said, "and I need strength for walking to Bethel to pay for a pair of shoes I had on account. I'll just take all four drumsticks, I believe."



*Illustrated by
Ray Houlhan*

The Not So Blind Mice

THE work of the secret agent is of necessity an undercover job. The moment an agent's activities—or even a hint of his activities—come to the notice of the counter-espionage organization of the country in which he works, the man—or woman—becomes a liability instead of an asset to the employer. In peacetime every move will be watched and his activities curbed in a hundred different ways. In time of war he is on the direct route to a firing-squad or the gallows.

It is not a job for amateurs, investigating Congressmen or Senators; yet it rarely offers a full-time occupation. The number of men and women who do nothing but spy is surprisingly small. Scotland Yard's "Special Branch" of Intelligence consisted of 156 investigating and administrative officers when the second World War

started in the summer of 1939. They formed a nucleus around which the British semi-professional spy army was built up. America was even less prepared. Of course, no country advertises its methods of recruiting agents; but obviously it is not the sort of career which one may choose while at the university, evening school, the football stadium or by going around to an employment bureau.

Almost always the small group at the top come from the armed forces, because training in, and knowledge of the arts of war naturally provide an immense advantage. For the rest, special qualifications through a type of work of the locality in which it is carried out will influence a careful probing to test whether a man is suitable for the work, and whether a woman is prepared to do it. Somebody makes a recommendation; then

there is an informal interview, usually not at headquarters; perhaps a comparatively simple task is assigned. Its successful completion is followed by further investigation and further orders. Sometime after that there will come specific training and a glimpse of routine methods. And another test. The secret agent, looking back, will often find it hard to decide just when or why he—or she—became a "spy," or as it is usually called, an Intelligence officer.

Such is the way which has been practiced for three hundred years, when Britain created the first organized secret service, and France later became an adept student of Intelligence.

The Nazis and Soviets, contemptuous of traditional strategy and methods, particularly if they were of democratic origin, tried to create a



Secret agents of various nationalities — their characters, their successes and their occasional failures

by KURT SINGER

new and exact science of global espionage, to be taught like any other science or any other branch of military art. Their numerous spy schools and elaborate training curricula had the great defect of all such mass production systems of the human assembly line. A standardized type emerged; and the first principle of espionage, secrecy, investigation and research, received a mortal blow. The Allied Secret Services found evidence of the shortcomings of the dictatorial Intelligence offices time after time. A standardized agent will last only as long as he has orders and directives—and will be lost as soon as he is on his own.

Russia's Secret Service, led by the incredible and colorful Laurenti Beria, has adopted a similar scheme, which resembles that of Nazi Germany: the mass espionage system, the

global fifth column. How efficient it has been remains another secret of Lubianka Street, but I should like to point to the complete and speedy uncovering of the Soviet agents' work and identity in the U.S.A. and Canada, the arrest of the atom spies, the uncovering of agents in the Government service. To me it is an indication that the Soviet method is not over-successful in a vigilant democracy.

Neither Britain's nor America's Intelligence organizations have ever been seriously jeopardized or threatened. This is the best testimonial possible to the democratic system of relying on free people, on the part-time agent to a great extent. A schoolteacher on vacation, a business man seeking markets, a retired civil servant living abroad, a beautiful woman hunting for a husband, a newspaper correspondent, an artist—they all can do useful Intelligence work.

The primary thing is a knowledge of the language of the country in which the agent operates. Secrets which can be obtained merely by observation are generally limited; but by methods varying from direct purchase or lavish entertaining, to open bribery, burglary and maybe blackmail, it is possible to wrest the information from those who have it. Above all, there is the queen of all agents: the researcher.

FINALLY there are the free-lance spies, far more numerous in Hitchcock pictures and on the shelves of the fiction library than in the files of the secret services. But they do exist, and represent the unorthodox side of espionage. Most of them owe allegiance to their own country; they work from the idealistic motive of patriotism and political belief, and they seldom sell out to the highest bidder. They are found in every capital, haunting every international conference, every walk of life, ready to serve their country.

Women lead the brigade of free-lance spies. Women spies from Delilah to Mata Hari, from Mademoiselle Docteur to Louise Bettigny, from the woman behind Benedict Arnold to the woman behind atom spy Klaus Fuchs, they all have written history.

Women became gang leaders; even formed a spy syndicate. The best example in recent years was the Switz gang, which ended its brief but quite flourishing career in a trial in Paris. As a foreign correspondent I attended the trial, which was held behind locked doors. The uncovering of this prewar syndicate was as romantic and exciting as any fiction-lover could wish. A few blonde hairs adhering to a roll of camera film which had

come into the hands of the French Deuxième Bureau set the agents on a trail which led them to an unknown Madame Marjorie Switz. With the cooperation of the F.B.I. and Scotland Yard, her trail led to the complete unmasking of a gang which had ramifications through Europe, America, Asia and Africa.

MARJORIE SWITZ believed in Bolshevism. At the trial, it was stated that the syndicate had sold information to the Soviet Government. At the same time the members were being paid by the German Intelligence Service of Admiral Walter Wilhelm Canaris. They posed as Nazis. Marjorie Switz had received similar orders from the Communist International as Jan Valtin of "Out of the Night" fame had to face—saying: "For the benefit of communism, join the Fascist movements."

The Nazi secrets were sold by Madame Switz both to Poland and Yugoslavia, and the ingenious Red lady convinced her paymasters that she always believed in an enlightened dictatorship such as these countries represented.

Madame Switz specialized on mechanized war weapons, and an ill-founded claim to have valuable information on a "secret-ray" or "super range finder," capable of detecting aircraft scores of miles away. The more gullible believed it to be a death ray; the more intelligent in New York and London knew that it must refer to radar. She offered her knowledge to Scotland Yard, but she was unmasked as a Soviet spy. Fortunately for Britain, neither the Switz gang or anyone else could obtain the blueprints on the only workable system of its kind at the time—the top secret: Britain's coastal radar chain.

The Switz gang had the conventional "master-mind" as its ringleader. He was prepared to sink unlimited Soviet capital into these activities, and she worked under the cover of a commercial organization with branches in London, Paris, Brussels, Stockholm and Berlin. The French Secret Service never found this Soviet boss, but they grabbed the chief operators, and broke up the spy ring.

The chief figures besides the beautiful British-born Marjorie Switz was her husband, Gordon Switz, a dismissed former American Air Force officer. Marjorie incidentally was the daughter of a London taxi-driver. Her helpers were German-born Baroness Lydia Stahl, and two Soviet citizens, Benjamin Bercovitz and Boris Rashevsky. The Baroness was well known to the counter-espionage of a dozen countries as a Nazi agent, and the court had few qualms in finding her guilty and sentencing her to five

years' imprisonment as an agent who worked for both sides: Germany and Russia. I am told that the Baroness is living today behind the iron curtain of the Soviet empire. Bercovitz was a Russian-born Canadian and the financial expert of the syndicate, holding double citizenship and assessing the value of the secrets they had collected. Bercovitz belonged to the plotters of the atomic spy ring in Canada, of recent years.

Rashevsky was an ace agent of Laurenti Beria's Soviet secret service. He was never caught, and received sentence in his absence. . . .

Marjorie Switz was in charge of this "board of directors." Her husband, a weakling, had to take orders from her like all the other "executives." There was a professor of languages Marjorie had discovered, a colonel in the French army who had made love to her, a famous explosives expert who needed money, and a biologist engaged at the Sorbonne. Various women's names were also mentioned at the trial, and they appeared to be mainly the glamour appeal with which to wring out secrets from those who had them. One of these ladies, Marie Schoul, sentenced to five years' imprisonment in her absence, received later ten years for Soviet espionage in Finland, just to be freed, when Finland came under the shadow of the Russians.

Marjorie Switz had imagination. She hired a dentist for the ring. He was Dr. Riva Davocici, a Rumanian practicing in Paris, who fitted up the gang's couriers with hollow gold teeth where onion-skin paper copies of documents could be concealed. Marjorie formed a small orchestra which toured Europe carrying its contraband concealed in the wind instruments. Information was taken out of Britain in a secret pocket of a volume of Lloyd-George's memoirs. At the time of this adventure the Switzes lived in a pleasant modern apartment in Chelsea.

The spy ring worked efficiently and well, and only the arrest of a few turncoat informers for the sake of the light sentences they would receive enabled the French Deuxième Bureau to break it up.

GOVERNMENT agents rarely make money. Few can hope for a salary in excess of nine thousand dollars. But the Switz gang made money. Still, most agents enter the secret service because the lure of excitement means more than money, or because patriotism means more than monetary gain. The British and American Intelligence offices have always preferred the latter type, and the supply has always exceeded the demand, even among women agents.

There were quite a few women agents in German industrial, government and military circles. Some of them witnessed the strangest spy cases.

I know an elderly American lady who decided after the fall of France to stay in the occupied country in order to be near her daughter, who was married to a French underground leader. The elderly lady was a key agent for Allied secret services. Toward the end of 1941 two German officers occupied her apartment. She realized that as she had remained in France of her own free will, she could not complain. For nearly three years she shared her home with the two Germans, never speaking to them unless it was unavoidable. The behavior of the two German officers was scrupulously correct.



When she arrived at the agreed place late for her appointment, she saw the man being led away.

In July, 1944, orders came for evacuation, and the old lady's servant brought a message from the officers saying they wished to see her. She went to them, and stiffly they thanked her for the manner in which she had carried out her duty, which they realized must have been extremely distasteful. She replied briefly that the sooner they left, the better she would be pleased.

"They clicked their heels, bowed, and handed me a small box," the old lady said. "Nevertheless, we ask you to accept this as a token of our gratitude," one of the officers replied. "But please do not open it for twenty-four hours."

They left the house and drove away. The American woman and her maid wondered if the box was a booby trap, but they decided to wait, and to respect the Nazi officers' wishes. When at the appointed time the box was opened, it contained a small silver cigarette case, and inside was a card which bore the words: "With many thanks from two members of the British Secret Service."

THE deeds performed by Allied women agents and saboteurs often paid with death, will never be told in full. But some of these unsung heroes have been revealed:

Odette Sansom was a thirty-four-year-old attractive French woman, married to a Briton, and mother of three pretty girls. She is now the only living woman and female agent decorated by King George with the George Cross. She parachuted into France, and when caught by the Germans defied the most terrible tortures—among other devilish things the master-race did to her, they removed her toenails one by one. She took it courageously—rather than betray her fellow parachute-agent and commanding officer, Captain Peter Churchill.

The fact that women agents were parachuted into Europe was not revealed to the public until after the war, when the world was horrified at the evidence brought out at a British military trial trying twelve S.S. storm troopers for burning alive four British women at the Natzweiler concentration camp.

One of them was twenty-eight-year-old Diana Hope Rowden, who had been cut off in the South of France, where she lived with her parents when France collapsed. She escaped through Spain and Portugal to England, joined the WAAF in July, 1941, and volunteered for Intelligence work. After her training, she was dropped near Dijon and contacted the French Maquis. The Canaris secret service caught her and she went to Natzweiler. There she was thrown into the cremation oven, with the

concentration camp's medical officer standing by.

Another typical case is that of Violette Szabo, a British girl from Stockwell, who married a Free French officer. He was killed at El Alamein; and Violette, who was a junior commandant in the A.T.S., volunteered for espionage work to "get her own back," as she put it. Twice she parachuted successfully into France, but on the third occasion she was betrayed, sent to Ravensbrück concentration camp, and murdered in January, 1945.

Many of the women who worked so splendidly for Allied Intelligence were not members of the secret service in the strict sense of the word. For instance, the hundred or so women who were parachuted into enemy territory along with several thousand men prior to D-Day were part of the Airborne Reconnaissance Force under direct orders of General Eisenhower.

Many an underground leader in France or Denmark received his instructions and materials for sabotage work from girls barely out of their teens.

Perhaps the most vital achievement in secret-service work during the last war was accomplished by a small raven-haired French girl, whose real name must still remain secret. In the files of the Intelligence offices in Washington, London and Paris she is known under "La Souris" (The Mouse). The name was given her because of her secret signal, which was a delicate scratching on a window-pane or door. It was "the mouse" who, under the very noses of the Gestapo and the German counter-espionage service, smuggled to Britain the first plans of the V-1 bombs, and thus gave our scientists, the R.A.F. and the U.S. Air Force, vital clues.

DURING the German occupation she worked as a civil servant for the Vichy administration. Through a French technician who was forced to work for the Germans, she obtained some of the blueprints of this horror weapon, the V-bomb.

On the day when she was going to hand over the priceless documents to an Allied courier to bring them across the Channel, she was five minutes late for her appointment. When she arrived at the agreed place, she saw the man being led away by Gestapo officers. The fact that she was late actually saved the plans, and they were smuggled out of France by another messenger.

That Adolf Hitler was unable to use V-weapons against Britain at an earlier date, and that they caused no more damage than they did, is attributable to another woman agent. The British Secret Service had con-



"We ask you to accept this token of our gratitude," one officer said. "Please do not open it for twenty-four hours."

centrated their efforts on unmasking the German V-weapon preparations ever since preliminary reports had been obtained in the summer of 1942. It was known that the main research and experimental station was situated at Peenemünde on the Baltic.

It was no coincidence that the raid which blasted Peenemünde took place when some of the key men of Germany's scientific war potential were there. Two hundred of them were killed, including the director of the experiment-station, and the chief of staff of the Luftwaffe, General Hans Jaschonnek—the greatest air-raid disaster of its kind during the war.

The German secret service swooped on the island and questioned every

inhabitant and worker in the place in an attempt to trace the leakage among people who had been checked and re-checked. Nothing was revealed. Then they combed through rubble and examined the corpses of the dead.

IN the skirt pocket of one dead girl they found a crumpled piece of paper—a London bus ticket. Her records were investigated. She had come to work at Peenemünde on the personal recommendation of a high Nazi official, and the evidence was dismissed as a relic of a peacetime visit to Britain. Had they probed further, they might have discovered the ticket was printed on war-standard paper.

Sea Hounds of

A THRILL-CRAMMED DRAMA OF ROME AND BRITAIN

by W. F. TAYLOR

THE tavern by Lud's Gate was smoky with the light of torches and raucous with oaths. Roman soldiers, sailors and marines drank, boasted and laughed together with gladiators and charioteers from the Great Circus, with wild-beast trappers, pearl-fishers, caulkers, sailmakers, porters, dockers, and packmen from the port of Londinium. British shepherds in sheepskins and gayly checkered trousers rubbed shoulders with Greek mariners from Marseilles and Phœnician seamen from Gades. There were German shock troops in wolfskin cloaks and horsehide boots, their hair dyed red and tied in tufts; there were Moorish javelin-men in burnouses and leopard-skins, their greasy black locks tied in ropes of camels' hair.

Women there were too, red-robed "she-wolves" with yellow wigs or with their hair dyed yellow as Roman law demanded. An Icenian horse-dealer was talking to a woolly-headed Ethiopian with a green parrot on his shoulder. There was a Gaulish showman with a tattooed Attacottian from Caledonia, a Gaelic tribe who were reputed to be cannibals. There were thieves, pick-purses, and dice-fakers. An image of Lud the seagod stared down from a niche in the wall.

The city which the Romans called Londinium, and the Britons *Caer Lud*, held high carnival tonight. The Empress Valeria was leaving for Rome on the morrow, after a state visit to the province of Britain, and the city of Lud feasted in her honor.

Swathed in his scarlet military cloak, Marcus Vindex Cunedda sat in a corner and watched the revelers—a tall, sinewy fellow with red hair and eyes, gray as a mountain tarn, descended from British tribal kings, and at the same time a Roman citizen and tribune of the Twentieth Legion. For this was the Third Century of the Christian era, when the Roman Empire was fast tottering to its fall; and it was a common jest that the "blue Britons" were more Roman than the Romans themselves.

A short, fat, baldish fellow with stick-out ears began to sing:

Valeria, Valeria, who's your lover now?

A senator, a gladiator, a centurion of the guards?

Throughout the Roman region, They're enough to fill a legion Valeria, Valeria, who's your lover now?

A roar of mirth shook the tavern. Valeria Augusta! She was another Valeria, another Messalina. She it was who ruled the decadent Empire, not the feeble Caesar who wore the purple; her cruelty and her love-affairs were the theme of street-songs from the Great Wall of Britain to the deserts of Ethiopia.

Listening, Cunedda showed his teeth in a savage grin, for he was Valeria's latest lover. She had picked him out when she was inspecting the garrison of the Wall, and after seeing him vanquish a giant bull in the arena.



Under a fold of his war-cloak, Cunedda felt for the hilt of his short legionary sword. He recognized the singer—Balbo, one of the Empress' freedmen. Presently he'd slit Balbo's ears for that insult. But not now. It wouldn't do for him to be mixed up in a common tavern brawl, with Valeria's name on his lips. Later, when Balbo had left the tavern—

"Here's to the Divine Valeria!" hiccoughed Balbo, holding up a foaming tankard. "Hark ye, my bold rawhide boys of the legions. Have you heard how Egypt conquered Rome? Why, 'tis this: The Egyptians worship a cow-headed goddess named Hathor. Nowadays the Romans worship a cow goddess named Valeria."

Laughter filled the tavern. The crude murals seemed to grin through the fumes of torches. Balbo must

the Saxon Shore



"Seize him!" Valeria ordered, her face a mask of jealous hatred. "Take him! Take him alive!"

have drunk deep of the sweet Celtic mead to have talked so recklessly about the Divine Augusta.

"It's not Jove, but Venus and Bacchus who rule the Empire these days!" continued Balbo. "Drink to Cupid, say I. I'm as thirsty as Tantalus—ah-h-h!"

THE ragged curtains behind the rows of amphorae on the counter parted suddenly. Through a narrow doorway a lissome figure glided into the smoky den, swaying her hips and clink-clonking her silver anklets.

"Salome!" There was a thudding of leathern jacks and stone mugs upon the tables. "Salome, the dancer of Gades!"

Salome was like a vivid flame stirred by the wind. She floated into a circle of sputtering clay lamps—golden-skinned, almond-eyed, the rose

in her glossy raven tresses like a scarlet drop of blood.

Slowly, languorously, she began to dance to the lilt of reed pipes and thudding of tom-toms from the musicians squatting behind her. A skirt of purple mesh wavered around her sinuous figure. She seemed to be in a trance.

Then gradually she quickened her pace. Cymbals clashed. She woke to a sudden vivacity, striking her tambourine so that the bells jingled through the hushed tavern.

All the passion of the East was in that dance—for Gades was an Oriental city, founded by the Phœnicians, and its dancing-girls were a byword for love and intrigue. Greek, Spanish and Libyan blood ran in her veins, besides that of the sailors of Tyre and Sidon. It was by such a dance that another Salome had won the head of John the Baptist.

Men watched with greedy eyes. Cunedda was spellbound. Never had he seen anything like this in the remote frontier of Caledonia.

Suddenly she stilled. There was a deep hush. Silently she stood, her dark, liquid eyes roving the tavern. With a dazzling smile she singled out Cunedda, sidled toward him, and crouched for him to wet a coin and place it on her forehead.

"Watch! Watch out, Briton!" cried a Frisian seaman.

A Phœnician slaver, hooded in a Moorish burnous, spat a curse and whipped out a damascened scimitar. Cunedda flashed the short Roman sword from its sheath, folding his legionary cloak round his left arm for a shield.

It took little to start a riot in that den. The proprietor and his bullies

rushed from behind the counter to restore order. The Phœnician reeled aside, clutching his wounded forearm. A sailor from Carthage, one of his mongrel crew, tried to slash Cuneda with a knife, but was knocked down by a pugilist from the Great Circus. The fight spread to the rest of the carousers — sailors, legionaries and gladiators fighting with knives, cudgels, and porters' straps, whilst half-naked furies yelled them on.

"Master! Follow me! This way!" The sibilant voice of Salome whispered into Cuneda's ear.

With his hot Celtic blood afire, he was minded to fight it out, but reason warned him that it would be as well to retire before he was recognized. He had blooded the Phœnician, and it was nigh to the hour of the third watch, when he should report for duty at the Prætorian Palace.

Alert for lurking stabbers, he followed Salome through back ways till they halted in a narrow lane by Lud's Gate.

"Salaam, my lord! The favors of the Kabiri by upon you!" breathed Salome. "By Astarte, I saw you wound Malgo. Aie! I am his slave. He treats me like a dog. I wanted you to kill him!"

"By Hercules, a fine compliment!" The Briton was partly angry, partly amused. "So that was why you honored me in the tavern."

"I recognized you, Lord Cuneda. You are Valeria's lover. A man bold enough to dare that would not be afraid of Malgo the slaver and his cutthroat crew. But I love you too, Briton. I love you as Tanith might love!"

SALOME came close, her kohl-dark eyes glowing in the glimmer of a hanging lamp; and the soft, elusive perfume of her made him forget that he was the Empress' favorite. As she flung her arms about his neck, however, there was a reek of torches, and Cuneda swung round, his naked sword flashing blood-red in the sudden glare.

But it was not Malgo and his slavers who had tracked him down. The torches flickered upon the figures of muscular, half-naked gladiators, and in their midst was a woman in the scarlet mantle and blonde wig of a street-walker.

"Seize him!" cried a voice that was choked with rage—the voice of Valeria Augusta, Empress of Rome!

Valeria!

Cuneda had heard how Valeria was wont to roam the streets of Ostia and around the Milvian Bridge, disguised as a "she-wolf," and seeking lovers among the scamen and gladiators, but never had he believed it. Until now! But there was Valeria

with her violet eyes and tawny hair which glowed as she stripped off her blonde wig; and there could be no mistaking those cruel narrow nostrils and that pouting underlip.

"Seize him!" Valeria ordered again, her face a mask of jealous hatred. "Take him! Take him alive!"

The gladiators closed in upon Cuneda. Salome fled with a jingle of bracelets and anklets, disappearing into the maze of hovels, mews, and narrow, crooked footways. The gladiators did not pursue her. They had enough to do to handle Cuneda.

THE Briton fought like a trapped wolf. But he had no chance against those trained fighters of the Colosseum. A *secutor* in bronze breast-plate and Thracian helmet took his lunge on a shield. A Greek wrestler dived upon his knees. A *retarius* hove a rope net over his head and shoulders so that he was hopelessly entangled, and he was overpowered by numbers.

Cuneda was stripped of his armor and golden torque; a heavy wooden fork was yoked to his shoulders, and his hands were lashed to its sides by leathern thongs.

"Traitor! Slave! Ingrate!" Valeria struck him across the face with a jeweled hand. "You did not see me in the Lud's Head tavern when you made love to that slut of a dancing-girl, did you? A common dancer from Gades! And I would have made you Governor of Britain!" She struck him again, fetching blood. "Do you know where you are going now? You are going to the galleys along the Saxon Shore!"

The mists cleared gradually from Cuneda's brain.

"Valeria!" he panted hoarsely, but she laughed in scorn, and flung her wanton's robe around her as if it were the imperial mantle.

"Take him away!" she said, and the gladiators forced him along between them.

At Lud's Gate they were met by Balbo, grinning all over his greasy face.

"Greeting, my Lord Cuneda! The barge of Venus is prepared for your voyage of love!" he snickered, and the gladiators guffawed.

Ahead strutted Balbo in his freedman's cap, Cuneda stumbling along in the grip of the gladiators like a drunken man. It was a nightmare—yet it was real. Not that he might have expected anything else from the capricious Valeria. Tarsa the Thracian gladiator, Caius Cassius the senator, Cleonides the Greek pantomime actor—she had tired of them all one by one and cast them aside.

Nevertheless he scented a mystery. It was more than chance, surely, that

Valeria had been in the tavern with her bully gladiators when Salome made love to him. Now that he had time to consider, he remembered that it was Balbo who had whispered that he might hear of a plot against him if he visited the Lud's Head tavern at that hour. There were many who would have been glad to step into his sandals as Valeria's favorite.

With clank of armor and tramp of heavily nailed sandals they struck through the narrow cobbled streets at the foot of Lud's temple, through a maze of potteries, dye-works, and reeking tenements, till a whiff of cold air told him they were near the river. They marched through Belin's Gate, past the fine bronze statue of the Emperor Hadrian, and came upon the quays, where there was a clang and glare of armorers' forges, and a smell of wineshops and fried-fish shops. A coppery moon shone over the misted river, over a tracery of masts and rigging where bluff-bowed, high-sterned ships with the figureheads of gods and goddesses lolled to the tide, their rows of oars like folded wings. A dim lamp shone by the shrine of Father Thames, where the murky waters lapped against Neptune's Stairs, not far from the Temple of Venus.

A LONG red trireme was moored to iron rings set in the quay beneath the Tower of Cyclops with its lurid cressets. There were dolphins and seahorses carved on its bows, tritons blowing conchshells on its lofty stern. The figurehead portrayed Andraсте, the British war-goddess, brandishing sword and torch as she stood upon the bronze chinera that was the ram.

Balbo put his fingers to his teeth, and blew a short whistle.

"Scorpio! Scorpio! Here's meat for the rowers' bench!"

A man came from the hatchway that led to the rowing-deck. A short, thick-set, heavily jeweled fellow, naked but for silver disks in his ears, and a dingy green kilt. His hair was curled like an Ethiopian's, and from his wrist dangled a long, heavy whip.

"Another lertyman for Charon!" cried Balbo. "D'ye recognize him, Scorpio? Venus' favorite lover! The Augusta has sentenced him to the galleys for kissing a dancing-girl of Gades when her back was turned!"

Scorpio stared by the glimmer of a horn lantern, then roared with laughter.

"Valeria's plaything! Valeria's pet! By the immortals, I've had some strange guests aboard the *Andraсте*, but never the like of this." He cracked his ox-hide whip. "Aye, but you won't find this bridal couch soft and comfortable, my young Apollo. This is the girdle of Venus I have here in my fist. This is the land

where dead oxen gore living men. Come below, my calfy-boy, and be initiated into the Ironmongers' Guild!"

Two rugged seamen forced Cunedda down the ladder into the gloomy 'tween-decks. It was a Pluto's underworld of filthy, sweaty bodies, of tar and bilge and spuniarn. There was a vision of dull, hopeless laces, a clank of letters as the sleepy rowers stirred in the tiers of benches.

Naked except for a filthy sheepskin that was flung to him, Cunedda was forced into the lower oar-bank; then the armorer and two of his mates riveted a rusty ankle-cuff on to his leg.

Scorpio sat on a scuttle, playing with his whip.

"Valeria likes her lovers as she likes fish—they're no good except when fresh. By the goat-headed god of the Cypriotes, I wish she'd fall for me! I'd be Prefect of the Praetorian Guards, with what I could give her. How did it happen, Balbo?"

Balbo smirked. "Valeria tired of him, of course. And I am her latest flame—"

"Now, now—you'll have Almighty Jove casting a thunderbolt upon us if you tell such lies!" cried Scorpio, flinging away the dregs of a leathern bottle. "Tell the truth, as far as is in your nature to do it."

"Well, then, I planned it: Sidonius bribed me—Sidonius the patrician, who loves Valeria. I told Cunedda he'd hear about a plot if he'd visit the Lud's Head—and that was the truth, because he did. I bribed Salome to make love to him. Sidonius whispered to the Augusta that Cunedda was unfaithful, and that she'd find it out if she'd follow him to the Lud's Head. . . . Odysseus himself couldn't have invented a prettier tale."

"By Hades, he'd not," agreed Scorpio. "You're clever at this sort of thing, aren't you, Balbo?"

"I'm as clever as Mercury, my patron god," said Balbo complacently, and he jingled a heavy purse.

"So am I, Balbo," crowed Scorpio, and with a cunning flick of his whip, he struck the purse to the deck.

BALBO made a dive for his ill-gained gold, and on the instant two of the overseers pounced upon him and dragged him to the slave-bench.

"Shackle him beside the Briton!" said Scorpio, stowing the purse under his kilt, and to show his power, he flicked his victims with his whip.

"Here's a kiss from Venus, my Empress' cuddly-boy."

That roused Cunedda!

Until then he had been dazed and listless by this sudden turn of fortune. But the searing ignominy of the lash



"The Roman woman is mine. Fire the Rome-Welsh ship!"

fired his temper, and with a fierce oath, he rose in his shackles and struck Scorpio full in the face.

The slaves looked on with lightened faces as Scorpio recovered his balance, his brutal visage aflame with rage.

"You rat's smell! You tomb-rober! You carrion of the galleys!" With every insult the ox-hide flayed the Briton's back. "I'll tame you, you whip-lodder! I'll give you war-paint, you blue-skinned Briton! I'll give you a purple tunic to your back, you Empress' lovey-dovey! You son of a Christian!"

Helplessly Cunedda folded over the slope of the oar, watching the drops of blood as they dotted the deck at his feet. Somehow the pain was a salve to his wounded pride. When the punishment was over, he raised unflinching eyes to the overseer.

"Some day, Scorpio, I'll make you eat that whip," he promised; but Scorpio only laughed, struck him a

parting blow and stalked away to his quarters.

A fair-haired giant seated next to Cunedda in the middle bank, spoke in a low voice:

"You are no nidding, Welshman. You spoke to that whip-carl like a man. Hail to you! Who are you, brother?"

The man spoke a Low German dialect similar to that of the Batavian and Frisian auxiliaries who served the eagles on the Wall, and Cunedda understood him fairly well.

"Cunedda the Briton, once a Roman tribune," he muttered painfully, between clenched teeth. "You are a Saxon, by your tongue."

The fair man gave a snorting laugh. "Not exactly. You Rome-Welsh call all raiders from beyond the gannets' bath Saxons. My people are the Angli—the English, we call ourselves. We live to the north of the Saxons, on the neck of Jutland, though like them we go a-viking against Rome.

Aye, I am one of the Sea-hounds of the Saxon Shore. Offa's my name. I was cast away off the Isle of Vectis, near Portus Magnus. The Rome-landers picked me up half dead from the swan's bath, and chained me to the oar. If they knew who I really am, they'd have crucified me or sent me as a gladiator to the Colosseum. I'm not dead yet, though. No, by Thor! I'll live to slay a few more of these Southlings, and drink from their skulls in Valhalla!"

Scorpio strode along the gangway, whip hung across his shoulders, and silence settled upon the benches. The slaves slumbered over their slanted oars. Balbo sat huddled in his chains, crushed by his deserved punishment. Cunedda could not sleep, however. Rats scampered; lice crawled; but he remained brooding over his bitter thoughts. It was for this that he had shamed his manhood! A galley-slave! A rowing-bench instead of Valeria's porphyry couch with its golden canopy, fetters and the whip instead of her embraces—this was his reward from Valeria, the shameless, the merciless.

"I forswear Rome!" he muttered, under his breath. "I forswear the eagles. I will be avenged upon Rome for this degradation."

THE rowers were aroused at day-break by whip-cracks and curses. There was a flourish of trumpets, a cheer from the waterside front of Londinium. Valeria was coming aboard with her slaves and lictors, her courtiers and bodyguard of gladiators.

Through the oar-port Cunedda watched her gilded barge coming alongside. Two Ethiopian fan-bearers shielded her from the sun. A Syrian slave-girl held a jeweled pomander to her dainty nostrils, that she might not be offended by the stench of the galley-slaves. Beside her minced and smirked that effeminate patrician Sidonius, crimped and curled and scented, wearing a Tyrian mantle and gazing through an emerald, and looking more like a woman than ever Valeria was likely to do.

Seamen sprang along the yards and let fall the sails. A bull's-hide drum beat. The slaves thrust out the long, heavy sweeps as the overseers marched to and fro, cracking their whips. The blades found water, churned and foamed. The *Andraste* gathered way. The trireme cleared the inlet, then stood into the Thames with the tide bearing her downstream, the flint walls and red roofs of Londinium falling astern.

"Row, you sons of dogs, row!"

One foot braced upon the stretcher, another on the bench in front of him, Cunedda heaved at the ponderous oar. Sweat ran into his eyes,

trickled down his unshaven cheeks, dropped on to his straining thighs. His temples throbbed. His eyes ached. He could see nothing in the shadow of the sweltering slave-deck, but the back of the man who rowed before him, criss-crossed with red, raw weals.

Spray and spume spattered through the oar-ports, salting sores and scars, and crusting on his blackened lips. The bull's-hide drum that timed the stroke seemed to pound upon his brain. He had fought and marched and countermarched over the peat and heather in pursuit of Caledonian clansmen, but never had he experienced anything like this.

Beside him Offa was pulling as if it were natural to him; and Balbo also rowed rather better than one might have expected, until Cunedda remembered that the freedman had once been a seaman in his younger days.

"Pull, pull, you crab-catchers! You oxhide-eaters! You, Number 46! Do you think you are taking your ease in a 'longshore tavern'?"

Scorpio lashed him unmercifully, and the Briton gasped as he strove with blistered palms and aching muscles.

The triple tiers of oars rose and fell to the measured strokes. Slowly the *Andraste* rowed through the gray, gleaming seas off the Head of Kent, with the white cliffs of Thanet a haze in the distance. The wind was too faint for the sail that was crested with the design of an eagle bearing a thunderbolt in its claws; and the slaves were almost at the end of their tether.

A BOSUN sounded his pipe. The drum fell suddenly mute, and the slaves hauled in the dripping oars, shipping them in the racks and falling forward like dead men.

The rations were served out, onions and lentils and sour black bread, and brackish water laced with vinegar to disguise its stench.

"D'ye find it a change from Falernian wine and nightingales' tongues on a golden dish?" jeered Scorpio; but Cunedda paid no heed.

Offa spoke quietly as soon as the overseer's back was turned.

"They boast that they rule the world, do the Rome-Welsh. But I have friends out there on the whales' path—free men who go a-viking with a red shield at the masthead, and bow their heads to no lictors or tax-farmers of Rome."

Cunedda growled over his bowl of lentil soup: "Yesterday I was proud to call myself a Roman soldier. Give me a chance to break these cursed chains, and Saxon, Anglian, or whatever you call yourself, I'll swear



brotherhood with your barbarian pirates."

"Spoken like a man," said Offa. "Your hand on it, brother."

"You may count on me too," muttered Balbo. "This is my reward for loyalty to the Empress. A galley-slave! I, who am descended from the ancient Etruscan kings—"

"You brought it upon yourself," grunted Cunedda. "I've you to thank for being here, Balbo."

But Balbo shook his head sadly. "You're no philosopher, Cunedda. As says Seneca, he who gives way to anger and revenge is less than the beasts. I've been a seaman in Rhodes, a strolling player in Athens, a pimp in Antioch, and a pick-purse in Alexandria. Do I reproach you for being the cause of my misfortune? It is best forgotten. It belongs to the past. I am prepared to forget and forgive."

Cunedda grinned sourly at Balbo's impudence.

"I swear by the gods of the North," murmured Offa. "What gods do you swear by, Briton?"

Cunedda thought a moment. "My forefathers worshipped the gods of the druids—Teutates and Tanarus, and Andraste the goddess of war. As a Roman soldier I swore fealty to the divine Caesar in the name of Jove and



"Salome, the dancer of Gades!" Cunedda was spellbound.

Mars; but I renounce Rome. Along the Great Wall I have seen shrines and altars to hundreds of gods—Mithras, Astarte, Cybele, Baal-Shammash, and the Egyptian Isis; but though I have paid salute to them all there is none to whom I would turn now."

"I am descended from Woden, the god of war in the North," said Offa, "but if I stood in the boat's head, as we call our shield-wedge, or were grappled ship to ship, I'd trust to my strong right arm rather than to the hammer of Thor."

Cunedda thought a moment before he replied: "Some two years ago I saw a few men, women and children being sent to the arena for worshipping a God who was said to have been crucified as a traitor to Rome. I watched them being clawed by bears and gored by bulls, and torn by savage British hunting-dogs. The legionaries mocked them for cowards—yet I wish I had now the courage of those Christians who died for their Crucified God."

"I have heard of the White Christ," said Offa—but before more could be said, there was a hail from the masthead, and a sudden trumpet-blast.

Offa stared through the oar-port. "Look, Briton, look!"

Through the haze of the North Sea loomed shapes that resembled sea-beasts. Cunedda could see crested figureheads, rows of shields like scales, sails that resembled spread wings, flashing oars that clawed the sea like talons. War-horns boomed. Shields clashed. There was a deep humming note which was caused, though Cunedda did not know it then, by the Sea-hounds bellowing into the hollow bosses of their shields.

"Sea-hounds!" cried Offa exultingly. "Now you'll see a gannet's feast. Come, eric! Come, garpike! We'll give them a blood-feast. Ahoi!"

Above deck was a tramp of feet, a clank of armor as the marines mustered, clapping on crested casques and cuirasses of scaly mail, and reaching down spears and shields from the arms-racks. The catapults were loaded and cranked, the fighting-turrets fore and aft manned by archers. The Roman commander, a grim high-nosed veteran who was that rare thing, a true-born Roman from the Apennines, mounted the after-deck and sang out a gale of orders.

The drum beat to a double note. Full ahead! Whips cracked; fetters clanked. Thirty strokes a minute!

Normally the Romans preferred to grapple and board rather than ram

the pirates with their war-beaks, or burn them up with fire-arrows from the catapults. They preferred to capture them on the homeward run with the loot of Spain and Gaul, and captives dragged from burning homesteads, so that they could claim the loot as prize-money, and claim compensation for rescued provincials—even if they had to sell them again as slaves. They were more anxious to do that than prevent the pirates from making their raids, it was said; but that was an old trick that had made the fortune of many a Roman fleet commander.

This time, however, they had waked a hornet's nest. Seven dragonships were bearing down upon the trireme, and more were coming out of the offing. It was fire, or the ram, or nothing.

The *Andraste* plunged forward, crested seas falling away on either side of the bronze chimæra, heading for the foremost longship.

EASIER planned than done, however, for the longships were quicker and handier than any Roman warship. Mediterranean models, of course, the triremes were much too long for their beam, and top-heavy with catapults and fighting-turrets.

They were designed for maneuvers in the calm Tyrrhenian Sea, not for the rough waters of the British Channel. On top of that, the slaves were dead beat after an eight-hour rowing spell, and all the whip-lashing in the world could not raise any more speed from them.

A warning cry—"In oars!"—but it was too late. The dragonship swerved in its course, then struck the *Andraste* a slanting blow amidships. A vision of a figurehead with gaping jaws, fierce, bearded faces, blazoned shields—then, *crack, crack, crack*, as the splintered oars flung the slaves screaming from the benches.

Warned by Offa, Cunedda and Balbo were just in time to let go the handles and dive under the benches. Around them tumbled their fellow-slaves, some broken-backed, some with fractured jaws and limbs, many mercifully dead. The reek of gore arose from the crowded benches. Screams rose harrowingly.

The Briton tugged desperately at his ankle-cuff. It would not give. He was doomed to sink or swim with the trireme.

Like a great, crippled sea-bird the *Andraste* fell away into the trough. The slave-deck was running blood and foam. Green seas sluiced through the oar-ports as she heeled over. Grappling-irons clanked. There was a tramp of feet, a roar of barbaric cheers.

"Ahoi! Out! Out!"
Berserk-mad, Sea-hounds climbed over the bulwarks. They hooked pronged spears, curved war-axes into the hull, and hauled themselves hand over hand to the decks.

ROMAN marines speared them as they came, shot them down from the fighting-turrets. Still they came. The iron dolphin was swung out from a spar. It dropped into the dragon-ship, which wallowed and sank, taking with it the Roman provincial captives, but the Sea-hounds still clung to the rail, knowing they must board the trireme or perish like rats. "Ahoi! Ahoi! Thor with us! Woden O!"

"Vivat! Vivat!"
Roman and barbarian war-yells clashed in a din of spears and shields. Down in the rowing-deck, those of the slaves who still survived were struggling with their fetters. Scorpio and his mates flayed right and left, but the men were beyond control.

Offa heaved the butt of his oar at Scorpio, knocking the overseer off his balance, and winding a broken chain round his knuckles. Cunedda struck Scorpio hard behind the ear.

"How d'ye like that, fetter-farmer?" he taunted, but Scorpio was beyond hearing.

"Quick, carl, his keys!" cried Offa; and straining to the full extent of his chain, the Briton managed to seize the keys that dangled from Scorpio's girdle.

It was a moment's work to force the crude lock that cumbered his ankle. Then he released Offa, and staying but to toss the keys into another clutching hand, he snatched up the heavy slave-whip and bounded up the ladder.

Above decks, Roman discipline still held against blind ferocity. Three more war-keels had grappled alongside, one to starboard, another to port, with the third hanging on to the steering-paddles. But the defenders had fallen back to the turrets behind locked shields. They fought stubbornly, those Belgian, Batavian and Frisian marines, stabbing the huge fair giants with their short swords, but still they came on, calling upon Thor and Woden, and glad to die it that meant that the Valkyries would bear them to Valhalla.

INTO this wild confusion charged Cunedda, and the slave-whip shot out like a vicious snake. Taken in the rear, the marines faced about, lost formation, and were soon herded into scattered groups.

Offa picked up a double-headed battle-axe from a dying hand and hewed his way to the after-turret. The Massiliote Greek who was steersman was struck down and pitched over the stern gallery. Cunedda slew the Roman commander with his loaded whip-butt, and reversed the gilded eagle which stood over the altar to Mars on the steersman's deck.

It was all over in a few minutes. The Roman marines were slaughtered where they stood, except for a few who sprang overboard and were drowned.

Cunedda stood panting, splashed with blood. The Sea-hounds gathered round him, staring at this naked human devil who had wrought such havoc with a whip.

For the first time he had leisure to examine them. A few wore byrnie of chain-mail, and helmets crested with the image of a boar or a griffin, or mounted with horns; but most of them had wolf or reindeer skins flung over one shoulder, banded and studded with metal, their hair tied in tufts to resist a sword-cut. A few had faces and arms tattooed after the Pictish fashion. Some had iron serfings round their necks—and he wondered, for no men had less the bearing of slaves.

There was a sudden war-shout, a clashing of broadswords and battle-axes against shields.

"Hail, King Offa! Offa, King of the English!"

Cunedda stared blankly, and Offa grinned through his mask of sweat and blood.

"Aye, I am King Offa, King of Anglen!" he said, with his short, gruff laugh. "Did I not say that the Rome-Welsh would have crucified me if they had known?"

The deck of the *Andraste* was running blood and piled with loot.

Rich armor and furniture, carpets of Babylon, Arabian spices, jeweled girdles, gold and silver plate, ivory, amber, porcelain, Corinthian bronze. It was seldom that the hard-handed sons of the North came by such booty.

Offa sat on Mars' altar, with a polar bearskin flung over his ring-byrrnie, his flaxen head covered with a bronze war-helm which had a silver mask and was crested with the gilded image of a boar. A long and heavy broadsword hilited with a narwhal's tusk was set across his knees.

"Hearken, war-carls, vikings, sea-mates all!" With his sword he pointed to Cunedda, who stood now in a war-shirt of elk-hide covered with flakes of horn. "Shield-mates, here is a warrior of the Brit-Welsh. A ship's thrall, sold under the spear, even as I was; but he is an earl among his own folk, and the Romelanders have made him a wolf's head. You saw him fight. I name him one of the Brotherhood."

"Aye, aye," came with a clash of spears and shields.

Offa held up a Greek goblet embossed with fauns and satyrs.

"Swear this oath, Cunedda: By the sword's point, by the shield's boss, and by the figurehead of the ship, you swear to be a Sea-hound and a viking. You are no longer a slave of Rome. You are one of the free sons of the North, free as the wind and the sea, till the skies fall in the Twilight of the Gods!"

"I swear!" cried Cunedda, and after tasting from the cup, Offa passed it to him, and he drank deep.

THE dead Romans still littered the decks, but there were a few captives, mostly galley-slaves; and among them Cunedda recognized Balbo.

"You here, Balbo?" he growled. "Pluto is particular whom he has in Hades, it seems, or did Neptune spew you up? I've a mind to twist your neck for you—"

"No, no, I'm your friend, Cunedda," wheedled Balbo, and he flicked a ruddy-stained knife from beneath his ragged loin-cloth. "Look! Didn't you see me stab that Roman marine who was going to make a target of you with his javelin?"

Cunedda sniffed at the knife. "That marine must have been a heavy drinker!" he remarked dryly. "It is wine that you have on that blade—did it come out of his veins?"

Balbo never flickered an eyelash. "Ah, now I remember, he had a leather flask hung to his belt—I might have stabbed him through that," he admitted cheerfully, and the Briton was forced to grin at his effrontery.

"I can well believe that you sliced the throat of a wineskin," he agreed; and then he had no time for more, for a shout told him that Valeria was being brought before Offa from the cabin.

The dead bodies of her gladiators cumbered the deck; her women and eunuchs cowered behind her, but she strode forward as haughtily as if she were mounting the golden throne in

twisted it from her and trampled it underfoot.

"You shall be my feast-giver, woman of the Welsh!" he said, tearing her elaborate coiffure with rude hands, letting her tawny hair pour down to her jeweled girdle in a flood. "You shall go a-seafaring with me to the North."

who says otherwise"—he jugged out his jaw and scowled around—"let him say so with his hand upon his shield, and I'll send him to feast with the gods."

"The gods are angry, King Offa. I smell bad weather—"

"Out of my way, you croaking old corpse-fowl!"

Offa heaved to his feet, swinging Valeria over his shoulder as if she had been a sack of corn. She kicked and squirmed and struggled, but he dazed her with a blow from his powerful fist, and called her by a very old English word, which is still in the language.

"Fire the Rome-Welsh ship!" he shouted, bearing her across the gang-plank to his own dragon-ship. "Take the war-gear, the gold and silver and the Nibelung's hoard, and carry it



Into this confusion charged Cunedda, slaying the Roman commander with his loaded whip-butt.

Rome. Whatever her other faults, Valeria Augusta was no coward.

"By Freya!" Offa spoke a barbarous form of camp-Latin which Valeria could follow. "A well-shaped heifer. A princess of Rome. She should make a fit mate for a son of Woden!"

Cunedda shut his mouth. Only he and Balbo knew that Valeria was Empress of Rome.

Valeria stared at Offa as if he had been some inopportune suppliant on Mount Palatine in Rome.

"What does this outrage mean, you insolent dog? Release me. I command you. You shall be crucified head down—"

Offa roared with savage laughter, and seizing her by a slender wrist, crushed her to his mailed breast, then kissed her fiercely and brutally. Valeria, livid with rage and humiliation, snatched the dagger at his belt, but he

A squat, dwarfish figure pushed forward, his right leg resting on an oaken peg.

This was Hunlaf Tree-foot, the smith. But he was more than a smith. He was skilled in witch-lore and leechcraft; he could carve runes, and interpret war-omens, and claimed that he could understand the speech of the birds and beasts.

"Hearken to the sea-fowl!" He pointed to the gulls that mewled and flocked alongside. "They warn us of ill-omen. This woman is a witch. She is fey. She will put the evil eye upon you. Let me carve a blood-eagle on her back, as a sacrifice, so that I may examine the will of the gods in her entrails."

Offa pulled his brows together in a savage frown. "This woman is mine. Mine by sword-right! You croak like an old crow, Hunlaf. I claim her as my share of the booty, and that man

aboard. We sail for Heligoland—the holy island!"

"A witch!" declared Hunlaf. "I warned you, Offa. You would not listen. I say it again. She has snake's eyes, and a snake's body, and look at her nails—blood-red! That's a sure sign of a witch."

Hunlaf had been right when he foretold bad weather. The ringed moon hung like a storm-lamp over a troubled sea. The wind wailed like a kelpie. The longships rose and fell over the "swan's bath," which was foamed all over. One did not have to be a wizard to see that the wrath of Thor was gathering.

Offa stood on the afterdeck of his dragon-ship, beside the grizzled sailing-master who held the great steering-oar. The Vikings were massed on the thwarts, sullen and discontented.

"You know the old law of the sea, King Offa!" persisted Hunlaf, knowing that he was backed by the crew. "There will be no luck for us with that witch aboard. One tenth of the booty, and one tenth of the captives, shall be cast into the swan's-bath to the gods for a speedy homcoming!"

"Aye, aye! Overboard with the Welsh witch!"

"You hear them, King Offa? One and all. Stern-men and stern-men, earls and earls, we are at heart together."

"I hear you!" said Offa. "Now hear me. I say the Romish woman is mine. I am Offa, King of the English." The moonlight glimmered eerily on the runes of his heavy broadsword. "You see this sword—*Naegling*, the nailer! I took it from Swertung the Berserk, when I slew him in single combat on the isle of Fjeldlor. Let any man speak again of a sacrifice, and I'll hew him limb from limb like a feast-ox, aye, by the holy ring of Thor. Who is that man? Is it you, Hunlaf?"

HUNLAF shifted his gaze, but Seafola the Stone-hewer spoke up, leaning on the long iron war-hammer from which he took his name.

"Aye, you are our King. You are King of the English. We chose you at the folk-moot when your father King Wermund went to Valhalla, and raised you upon our shields. Aye! But we are not slaves. We are free men. We will have our say!"

"Speak, then!" growled Offa. "Say on, Seafola the Stone-hewer!"

"You know the sea-laws, King Offa. The gods shed blood. One tenth of the gold and silver, and one-tenth of the captives are their share of the war-booty, lest Ran the sea-wife and her gray daughters catch us in their nets of seaweed."

Offa scowled ferociously.

"You are my father's foster-brother—" he was beginning, but just then Valeria came from the after-cabin, swathed in furs and with her glorious hair blowing round her like a tawny flame.

"What is it, Cunedda?" She spoke imperiously, as if she were still the Empress and he was her slave. "What say these Saxon dogs in their barbarous tongue?"

"They take you for a sorceress, Valeria," answered Cunedda, clinging to a backstay. "They want to sacrifice you to their Saxon sea-gods."

Valeria gave a soft, rich laugh.

"I am a sorceress, Cunedda. I am Venus' daughter, born of the sea-foam. Tell these ignorant savages that if they throw me to Oceanus, I will raise whirlpools to drag them to the depths, but if they obey my commands I will save them, as Medea saved the Argonauts."

Cunedda translated this as best he could to men who knew nothing of Greek or Roman beliefs; and Valeria mounted the after-deck, holding her hands high as if invoking the dark deities of the storm.

Offa roared with boisterous mirth. "Hail, rune-maker! Hail, princess of the Rome-Welsh! Who fears the flint-gray flood, and a pig's bladder o' wind? *Ahoi!* I thought I'd shipped a crew of red-hand Vikings who called themselves brothers to wolves and bears, not hallfings and hind-comers, fresh-water frogs with the hearts of hares, and with dyke-water in their veins. You should have stayed behind to grind corn with the women, Hunlaf, to lick the flesh-pots and die like sick cows in the straw, those of you who are afraid of the gods!"

There was a roll of thunder, a blinding flash.

A white sea hove out of the dark with a rain of hissing spume and spindrift. The dragon-ship was swept fore and aft in a lather of foam. Offa gripped the steering-oar beside the grizzled old sailing-master. For a time it seemed as if the longship would never rise to the crest. She came up bravely, though, but slowly and sluggishly, and there was an ominous swish and gurgle in the hold.

"Bail away!" roared Offa, wiping the salt from his face. "Bail for your lives, sea-carls. *Ahoi!* Blow your lungs out, Fasolt of the four winds. Strike away with your hammer, old Thor the Thunderer. I defy the gods! I am Offa! Offa the sea-king! I'll fight you, Woden, if I cross the rainbow! Why should I fear the gods?"

Whether by Valeria's witchcraft, or Offa's sea-cunning, they rode out the storm. It was Valeria who bade them break out a cask of whale-oil and throw it overboard, and to their awe and wonder, this libation to the sea-gods caused the waves to abate their fury. It was Offa who stood by the steering-oar three days and nights, snatching only short spells of sleep, and cheering on the Sea-bounds when they were exhausted with bailing.

It was on the fourth day the sun came through a scudding cloud-wrack, and they espied fringes of foam on the low-lying sand-dunes. Hunlaf consulted the two talking ravens he had in a cage after the mast, and cast chips of birchbark carved with runes into the sea, and these guided them to a landfall a few miles north of the Cape of the Gray Nose. Thereafter they followed the coast, rowing and bailing, careless of cold and wet and salt-water boils, and singing their songs of the Saxon Shore. At night as they spread their ship-tents, lying in the lee of one of the Frisian Isles, the drinking-horn and the harp would

pass the rounds, and they would play draughts, make riddles, and play the boasting game till it was time for them to roll in their leathern sleeping-bags. Once they passed the mouth of the Rhine, there was no fear of the Roman guardships. Not since the time when Germanicus Caesar had lost a thousand galleys in a single storm had the Romans ventured into those shallow seas with their mists and sand-banks and treacherous tide-rips.

Then they came to the red, rugged island of Heligoland, the "isle of the gods."

THE ship of Malgo of Gades came creeping into the fiord.

The striped lateen sail was furled; the painted eyes in the bows seemed to search for rocks and reefs. There was a sea-horse carved on the bows, and a pair of hideous carved dwarfs mounted astern: A rakish, hawklike craft, and on the poop stood Malgo the slaver, with a rhinoceros-hide whip hung to his wrist.

The Isle of Heligoland was a natural fortress. A narrow, winding fiord burrowed into its red sandstone cliffs, and it was surrounded by miles of rocks and reefs. The island itself was riddled with caves and fissures, and the sea boomed in their depths. The seas around it were ruddy-tinged as if with blood, for erosion had taken its toll, and not once but several times it had almost been washed away by the furious gales of the North Sea.

With a green branch at the mast-head and a clashing of cymbals and tom-toms, the red slave-ship crept through the fiord, Malgo standing calm and aloof in his flowing caltan and his red *lez* swathed by a snow-white turban. His swarthy, earringed, half-naked crew were like himself, a motley gang of Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Sicilians, Africans, Spaniards, Greeks, and Gauls—half-breeds, cut-throats, runaway slaves and barbarians.

The fiord opened into a landlocked lake where were longships tethered to their mooring-stakes, booths and ship-houses and fishing-nets staked out on the strand, and the beach was thronged with tall, stately men in gay cloaks and wearing flowing mustaches—Jutes, Angles, Saxons, here and there a few Franks, Vandals, and Goths from the Swedelands. Women there were too, fair-tressed and blue-eyed, with girdle-hangers clanking as they walked, as if they too carried weapons and fought alongside their men—which, as a matter of fact, they very often did.

Malgo stroked his curly black beard and smiled inscrutably. It might have crossed his mind that some day these fierce barbarians would come down upon Rome to avenge the fall of

the Carthaginian Empire of his ancestors. What did concern him, however, was that there was a white shield over the strand as a sign that he might come and trade in peace, and that in the booths were huddled captives from the Roman provinces chained to logs. Malgo traded Roman arms and armor to the Sea-hounds, which he in turn brought back to sell in the Roman markets—too far from their own homes for them to be able to prove their citizenship.

A zigzag path climbed from the heath to a stockade guarded by horses' heads stuck on stakes, and above this rose the carved gables and pinewood porch of a lofty hall. Malgo went ashore in his boat, unarmed except for a Damascus dagger in his girdle, and no one questioned him as he climbed the path toward the hall.

Within were rows of carved pillars inlaid with walrus ivory and hung with shields, and the walls were covered with woven hangings and mounted with horns and antlers.

"What now, Malgo, old Punic sea-wolf!" sung out Offa from his high-seat by the hearth. "What brings you here?"

"The peace of Baal be upon you, Malik Offa, king of the seas." Malgo favored him with an Eastern salaam. "I seek slaves. I bring swords and spear-heads, and shirts of chain-mail forged in Roman armor-shops. I bring wine too—wine of Spain and Gaul, with the rich, red blood of the South."

"Aye, 'tis a stronger drink than our honey-mead and muddy ale," replied Offa.

The hangings were parted to admit Valeria from the women's bower. She looked like some savage heathen queen as she swept over the rushes, clad in sables and ermine, and with heavy, golden ornaments. The Phœnician was shrewd enough to show no recognition. She might have been born in the rugged North, instead of being reared in the luxury of decadent Rome. She submitted to the rough embraces of her barbarian lover as indifferently as she had watched Sidonius being butchered at her feet; but if Offa supposed that she did not harbor thoughts of revenge, he deceived himself.

She handed Malgo a huge auroch's horn rimmed and banded with silver, and the Phœnician spilled a libation before raising it to his lips. . . .

WHEN he had been feasted upon deer's flesh and swine's flesh, Malgo said, "I have news, King Offa. Great Cæsar has been gathered to the gods."

There was a stir of interest in the hall—from everyone except the captive Empress. Cunueda watched with a chine of beef skewered on his dag-



"Pray for your Christian God!" mocked Hunlaf; and there was a violent flash of lightning.

ger. Balbo, who had attached himself to the Briton as a sort of body servant, almost dropped the drinking-horn he held in his fat fists.

"Say on, Malgo!" said Offa. "How died the Kaiser of the Rome-Welsh?"

"The Prætorian Guards hewed him to pieces and threw his remains into a sewer. The Senate has proclaimed a new Emperor, but the legions in Gaul, Spain and Africa have revolted and raised their generals on their shields as Cæsars of the camp."

Valeria sat beside Offa as if sculptured of marble, but the barbarian king played with the peace-strings of his sword *Nægling* and smiled grimly.

"Nor is that all," said Malgo. "The Goths have crossed the Danube. King Kniva has sworn on his sword to destroy Rome and stable his warhorse in the Capitol. The Vandals are on the march. The Franks, Allemanni and the Marchmen are gathering on the Rhine. There are slave revolts throughout the Empire."

A gray-bearded elder rose from his seat.

"Now is the time, King Offa," he said. "Let us send round the war-arrow, to the Jutes, the Danes, the Warrings and the Burgundermen and the Longbeards. Let us sail west—overseas to the Britlands. We will

slay the nidding Welsh, who have forgotten how to fight since the Rome-lancers took their country. We will mark out the country in land-takes, seize their women and rear sons."

"Aye, aye! Ahoi! Let us feed the ravens, King Offa!"

Offa rose from his high-seat.

"Hearken, earls, carls, Sea-hounds, sons of Woden: I swear this oath on my sword-hilt. 'Twixt Yule and Easter's feast we will build longships and forge swords for the hewing. We will bind our hair for war. I swear that I will not comb my hair or trim my beard till I have conquered the Britlands and made it known as Engle-land."

There was a hoarse cheer, and Offa seized a harp from the pillar. A twang of strings, and then he burst into a wild, savage chant:

*Hark ye, Woden!
War-God, All-Father!
Lord of Valhalla!
I am Offa!
King of the Engle
Slayer of the Rome-Welsh!*

*Hark ye, swart raven
Old dusky-coated, horny-nebbed eagle
Hearken, brother wolf, gray man of
the woods!*



"Take that serf-ring from your neck. You have proved yourself a true Sea-hound, by Irmin!"

*Follow us to the hosting,
I bid you to the blood-feast
When we slaughter the Brit-Welsh.
When we hurl down their chests*,
Come ye, Valkyries
Daughters of Woden
Ride with us to Valhalla!*

The song died down with a clash of swords and shields, and then Hunlaf rose to point with an accusing finger.

"King Offa, here is one who did not drink to the war-gathering!"

A sea of flushed, excited faces was turned upon Cunedda.

The Briton sat with his arms folded, the drinking-horn untasted on the trestle table before him.

That savage war-chant had turned his blood to ice. Only too well did he realize what barbarian warfare was like—men tortured, women ravished, children cast upon spears. He knew these wild sons of the North—brave,

generous, hospitable, loyal to a fault; and he knew, too, that they were as pitiless as the seas. With the legions of Britain withdrawn to defend Rome, the Britons would be left to fight defenceless against the Sea-hounds.

"Drink!" hissed Balbo into his ear. "Drink, Cunedda. Pluto! I'd drink the Styx dry, rather than argue with these savages!"

"King Offa!" Cunedda rose from the cross-bench, ignoring Balbo. "When I swore the blood-oath and joined the Sea-hounds, you told me I must wear a serf-ring until I proved my manhood. You know I am no coward. But the Britons are my own kindred. You would not have me fight against my own people?"

Offa pulled moodily at his chin whilst Valeria whispered into his ear. The fumes of ale and mead had mounted into the heads of the Sea-hounds, and their voices rose in tumult.

"Down with the Welshman, the outlander!"

"Throw him into the adder-pit!"

"Shoot him to pieces with arrows!"

"Drown him under a hurdle for a niddering!"

"Nay, brothers, pelt him—pelt him with the bones!"

It was an old custom to pelt captives to death with beef-bones and drinking-horns and the horned skulls of oxen.

Cunedda would have become the target for a volley of missiles, but the bull-voice of Offa filled the hall with thunder.

"Hold! Have done!" he roared, striking the carved rests of his high-seat with his fist, and the noise subsided.

Valeria still whispered into his ear, and it was clear that Offa was completely under her spell.

"Cunedda the Welshman, you are my blood brother!" he said, slowly and deliberately. "I would save you if I could. But you make that impossible. Hearken! You know the old custom of the Sea-hounds. When the sons of Woden go to war, the first prisoner taken is matched against a champion chosen by lot, so that we may foretell by omen the fortune of the war. Cunedda, you are our first captive. If you fall, then I swear by Woden and Thor to give you a sea-king's burial. You shall be put in the death-ship with your horse and hound and war-gear, and sent in flames to Valhalla. Such is my rede. Ho, there, Oslac! Wulfgar! Ingulf Split-nose! Take him away!"

For several days Cunedda was held a prisoner. Though he was closely watched, he was not ill-treated; neither was he denied plenty of food and exercise. Uncivilized as they were, the men of the North had a rough idea of fair play. There followed days of hot, flat calm, but signs that the weather was breaking up into the storms of the autumnal equinox were not wanting.

Then one day he was aroused from his couch of skins and furs by the reek of a pine torch, and blinked open his eyes to see Balbo standing over him.

"Shh! Cunedda!" warned the freedman. "I've come to warn you: today you're to fight the Northern gods."

Cunedda shrugged.

"It has come, then. I thought it would not be long."

"That wizard Hunlaf has been watching the stars," Balbo went on. "The storms should break today. Your fight is to be a symbol—the gods of the North against those of Rome. When you're killed—and you've about as much chance as a Christian against a gladiator—it will be declared propitious for the invasion of Britain."

"I wonder Valeria hasn't used her influence with Offa," remarked Cunedda, feeling the edge of his sword.

*Chest: derived from the Latin *castrum*, a city or a castle, to be found in Manchester, Leicester, Doncaster, etc.

Balbo pulled a lip. "You don't know Valeria, or you'd not say that, Cunedda. Valeria is urging Offa on. Why? She's mad with lust for power. If she can't rule Rome, she'll ruin it. She'd like to rule Britain as a heathen queen, even if it means turning the whole country into a desert first. She hates Offa, of course—she'd poison him if she dared; but even if he fails, she'll have the solace of seeing him nailed to a cross by the Romans and left to the carrion crows. The love of Valeria! I'm glad she never fell in love with me. I'd sooner be kissed by Medusa."

A jingle of ring-byrnie sounded, and two of the Sea-hounds came to escort Cunedda to the announced place of combat.

As a practiced seaman as well as a wizard, Hunlaf had chosen the time well. A storm was brewing like a witch's cauldron. There were mountains of copper-hued clouds tinged sulphur and olive. The swart-bleak seas were crested with the "gray sisters" as the Sea-hounds called the waves, the daughters of Ran the sea-goddess, and they foamed against the stupendous cliffs with a sobbing wind-note.

The place chosen for the fight was in keeping with the scene: It was a flat upland, swept by the wind, and there was a circle of rough unheaven stones known as the doom-ring. Nine of them there were, carved with runes, and in their midst stood a huge wooden idol of Thor the Thunderer, holding his hammer and strangling Snake Midgard.

The Sea-hounds were gathered in a circle round the doom-ring. Offa sat in his high seat with his boar-crested war-helm and his coat of bronze Roman chain-mail. Valeria sat beside him, hands folded over her lap, as calmly condescending as she had been in the tribune of the Colosseum.

"Cunedda the Briton," said Offa in his deep, strong voice, "you have now your chance to prove your sword-play against the gods. Three champions of Thor and Woden will come up against you. The rune-wife will draw the twigs and call on them in the name of the All-Father."

Three! Cunedda was taken by surprise. This was more than he had bargained for; but when he turned to Offa in mute protest, the King evaded his gaze. Then he understood. Hunlaf had been right. Valeria had indeed cast a spell over King Offa—not by sorcery, but the age-old spell that every woman holds over a man.

A gray-haired rune-wife came forward and muttered charms over a white napkin that was spread over the doom-stone. Then she drew a rowan-twigg and held it up.

"Ingulf Split-nose, you are chosen to fight Cunedda the Briton," declared Offa. "Stand forward, name your gods, and come to handstrokes—and let no man interfere on pain of death!"

Ingulf Split-nose was a fierce young warrior with his face cleft by a frightful sword-cut; he still wore his iron serf-ring to show that he had not yet proved himself in battle; but that he would make a formidable antagonist Cunedda did not doubt.

"Woden O!" Ingulf breathed upon the runes carved on his spear. "Woden, guide this spear!"

Cunedda had a sudden inspiration. "I call upon the Crucified God!" he said, and he held up his hand to make the sign of the cross.

Ingulf braced himself for a throw. His body acted as a powerful spring. The spear leaped from his hand with a vicious hiss, and Cunedda flung his at the selfsame instant.

The Briton felt Ingulf's spear graze his cheek, drawing a spatter of blood; but his own weapon, the Roman legionary *pilum* with its long, soft blade, crunched deep into the round linden-wood shield of his opponent.

It dragged Ingulf's shield down; and swift as a wildcat, the Briton sprang, planting his foot on the shaft and at the same time whipping out his short double-edged sword.

Eager as Ingulf was, he was wary. Instantly he let go his cumbered shield, and wheeled to escape the lunge that almost pierced his throat.

Cunedda recovered, then dropped his own shield. There was a growl of applause from the watching Sea-hounds. Ingulf rushed forward like a mad bull, whirling his sword with a back-hand stroke that would have cleft the Briton's skull had it landed. The lunge was quicker than the stroke, however, and the point tore through some of the links of his byrnie, and scraped along his ribs. Ingulf halted, gasping with pain, and stared blankly at his own sword, which had bent like a hook—crudely smelted, the swords of the North were primitive beside those of the master-smiths of Rome. Cunedda could have spitted him like a lark as he paused to straighten it out with his foot, but he forbore to do so, and again there was a hoarse murmur from a thousand throats.

Ingulf charged again, recklessly, and Cunedda feinted, turned aside his whistling blade, and ran him through his bull neck.

"First blood!" he said, holding his sword in salute as Ingulf thudded down like a felled oak.

A drop of rain splashed his cheek. There was a distant roll of thunder, like the tune of muffled drums. The storm was on the point of breaking.

Ingulf was carried out on the shields of the Sea-hounds. Seafola the Stone-hewer was the next to stride into the doom-ring.

An older man than Ingulf, he was crafty and war-wise, and the war-hammer he swung round his head looked a formidable weapon. Slow and sure-footed as a bear he came on; then the hammer crashed down like a thunderbolt. Cunedda slipped aside easily enough, but he was not prepared for the sudden recovery and upward swing which would have fractured his jaw if he had not been swift as the lightning. As it was, the war-head numbed his right shoulder, so that the sword dropped from his paralyzed hand.

One-handed, he grasped the helve of the hammer, and the two swayed locked in a close embrace. Seafola was tough and wiry, but Cunedda was younger, and moreover had learned certain tricks of wrestling from a Moorish soldier who had once been a gladiator. There was a sudden snap, and Seafola reeled away with his hand dangling by the wrist.

"Well done, Britling," he muttered, with a forced grin. "Win the third bout, and you are free of the doom-ring."

Hunlaf Tree-foot was the next to be chosen.

The Sea-hounds watched breathlessly. Crippled as he was, the wizard-smith was a dangerous fighter; many a time they had seen him pivot on his oaken peg like a top, and take an unwary enemy by surprise.

"See this axe, Britlander!" Hunlaf boasted, watching over his shield-rim. "I call it Hel, after the goddess of death—and her kiss will send you to the Otherworld."

"Come on, Hunlaf, and I'll send you to that alehouse you call Valhalla!" taunted Cunedda, taking up his sword with his left hand; but the Briton knew that he was fighting under a grave disadvantage.

So dark massed the thunder-clouds that it was almost like midnight. A sea of torches filled the doom-ring with a dancing glare, and Hunlaf plugged forward cautiously, twisting and turning his axe so as to flash the rays into the Briton's eyes.

Then abruptly he flung the axe with unerring skill.

Cunedda turned the head away with his sword, but it was a near thing, and then before he could recover stance, Hunlaf was on him with a belly-ripping slash from his sixteen-inch axe, the weapon from which the Saxons took their name.

The Briton swerved, avoiding the slash which would otherwise have torn out his entrails, but lost his footing, and the next thing he knew was

that Hunlaf was pinning him down with his timber foot, the seax sighted down for his throat.

"Pray for your Christian God!" mocked Hunlaf; and then, as Cuneda moved his lips in a prayer, there was a thunderous crash and a violent flash of lightning.

Hunlaf stayed his thrust, startled for the moment, and Cuneda gripped the oaken peg with his sound left hand and twisted the smith onto his back.

Hunlaf struck the doom-stone with his head, and lay stunned, the blood trickling from a wound in his temple.

Cuneda stood panting, breathless, and with a cry of rage Valeria seized a war-bow from an anchor standing beside her and fitted an arrow to the string.

The Briton's life hung by a thread. He had seen Valeria hunting wolves in the Pennines. She could shoot straight as Diana the huntress, and there was no mercy in her beautiful face; cold, ruthless, and utterly without pity, she knew that if Cuneda survived, the omen would tell against her chances of victory.

"A love-token from Cupid," she taunted, drawing the shaft to her bosom. . . . Then, as the Briton braced himself, there was a snap and a twang, and the arrow dropped to the ground as the bow quivered violently in her hands.

It was Balbo who had thwarted her vengeance—Balbo the freed man whose existence she scarcely deigned to notice, but who had crept up behind her hugging a knife in his rags, and severed the taut string.

Valeria turned around with a blaze of fury, but Balbo had sneaked through the throng, and before she could search for the man who had balked her, there came a rattling blast of hail, and the autumnal gale burst in all its fury.

The wind came like a howling titan, guttering the torches and ripping cloaks from men's shoulders, and the North Sea gathered its waves to hurl them against the cliffs of Heligoland. A cry went up from the darkness.

"It is the death of the gods! Woll Fenrir has come to devour Mid-*Earth*!" And through the trampling, struggling rout there came the roar of thousands of tons of rock loosening and crashing into the tempest-lashed sea.

It was not Ragnarok, the Twilight of the Gods. It was what had happened before, and what was destined to happen more than once in the future, the almost complete overwhelming of Heligoland by the fury of the North Sea.

Year after year the tides had undermined cliffs and burrowed for miles

in sea-caves and galleries, and now as a storm broke that had not its equal in a hundred years, the cliffs fell asunder and rolled into the sea like drunken giants. The piling seas surged into the narrow fiord, tossing rocks as if they had been pebbles, and the longships of the Sea-hounds rolled colliding and floundering onto the beach.

When the storm passed, one third of the "holy island" had been washed away, and where there had been a fiord leading into a land-locked lake was now a channel which divided the island into two. Hundreds of the Sea-hounds were drowned or crushed within collapsing caves, and those who survived gave thanks to Thor the Thunderer that they had been spared—though some whispered darkly that it was the White Christ who had proved to be a greater God than those gods of Valhalla.

Valeria was never seen again on the Isle of Heligoland. She had vanished like some wild spirit of the storm, and Malgo the Phœnician never returned to place his ill-gotten gains in Gades.

Cuneda and Balbo crept out of a crevice of rock where they had sheltered, and found King Offa standing with folded arms, watching the seas that were blood-red with the erosion of sandstone rock.

"Greeting!" said the King, standing with his cloak blowing around him. "I accept the omen. You have saved your country, Cuneda. Hunlaf was right when he declared that Loki's daughter would bewitch me. I am well rid of her." He clapped a powerful hand on the Briton's shoulder. "Aye, you may take that serf-ring from your neck. You have proved yourself a true Sea-hound, by Irmin!"

"Not so!" Cuneda ran a finger round the collar where it galled his neck. "I will wear it still, King Offa—till I have found the Christian God!"

HISTORICAL NOTES

"Sea-hounds of the Saxon Shore" is pure fiction, and the character Valeria is entirely fictitious. At this period (the Third Century A.D.) the Roman Empire was in such a state of anarchy that many of the emperors are scarcely more than names to the historian, and their empresses are not even that. The events described could not only have happened, but they might have happened without any of the contemporary historians considering them worthy of notice. I have imagined Valeria to be a character familiar to anyone who has studied Roman history—the type of Messalina, Agrippina, Calpurnia Crispinilla, Poppaea Sabina, Faustina and many others when the Empire was in its decadence. The Emperor Carinus, described as her husband, was a weak and voluptuous tyrant who ruled for a short while before he was murdered, to be replaced by the able and ruthless Diocletian.

The legend that Londinium, the Roman London, takes its name from the Celtic sea-god *Lud* is derived from medieval Welsh tradition, and is at least as likely to be true as any of the modern guesses on the subject.

Cuneda is the same name as the modern *Kenneth*. An old Welsh tradition speaks of a certain Cuneda who garrisoned the Roman Wall after the withdrawal of the legions, though this must have taken place at a rather later period—about A.D. 400.

The seating of the rowers on an ancient trireme is a matter of dispute and uncertainty, and one on which I am scarcely qualified to give judgment. It seems clear that there were three tiers of oars, from a bas-relief found in ancient Athens and also a statement by a Greek writer that the men on the upper bank received more pay because they had longer oars to work (this was before slaves and convicts were used).

The Saxon Shore was that part of the coast of Britain most exposed to the ravages of the Saxons—from the Wash to the Isle of Wight. The ruins of the old Roman fortresses still exist in many places such as Richborough (Rutupia), Eborac (Eborac), Lympne (Portus Lemani), and Portchester (Portus Adurni).

The earliest record of the Saxon pirates is in the year 286 A.D., when the Roman admiral Carausius mutinied, and with their help made himself "Emperor of Britain," but they must have been raiding the coast many years previously.

The description of the Angles and Saxons I have given is taken partly from the saga of "Beowulf" and partly from the relics I have seen from Sutton Hoo in the British Museum and in the Museum of Northern Antiquities in Copenhagen. If I have tried to assimilate them to the Viking Age, it must be remembered that they were practically the same as the Danes and Northmen of that period, and that their manners and customs (allowing for the interval of four centuries) practically the same also.

That they practiced human sacrifice is stated by the Roman writer Suetonius Apollonius, who also comments on their democratic character, mentioning that every rower considered himself the equal of the arch-pirate. Their kings were of course little more than tribal chiefs. In the old Norse sagas it is often mentioned how even able and popular kings (like Hakon the Good, for example) were overruled by the Thing, or Folk-Moot. Tacitus mentions that the Angles were among the tribes who worshipped the goddess Hæthra, or Mother Earth, who had her sanctuary on an island, which may well have been Heligoland.

The description I have given of Heligoland is wholly imaginary. On several occasions it has almost been swallowed up by storms, and in those days it must have been an island of considerable extent, and a natural haunt of the North Sea rovers.

King Osac is of course purely imaginary. Except for their mention by Tacitus in the "Germania," nothing is known about the Angles or English until their descent upon Britain in the Fifth Century; but the country just to the south of Denmark is still known as Angeln.

Illustrated by Raymond Siseley



Shakedown in Convoy

IT'S NOT SO GOOD TO BE DOWN IN THE ENGINE-ROOM WHEN AN ATTACK IS ON.

by JOHN F. WALLACE

THE graveyard watch was a half hour old, and in his room Chief Engineer MacReady was stripping off his sweat-soaked Diesel-stinking dungarees and shirt with the resigned air of a man used to heavy burdens and brief respites.

It was not Chief MacReady's fault that his Third Assistant had fallen apart after the first two days of heavy convoy fighting. It was not the Chief's fault that the Third had turned, almost overnight, from a briskly competent young man to a waspish thing more like a frenzied female.

Nor was it Chief MacReady's fault that his Second Assistant was a boozy little article, very good at his trade after a few days below had boiled the alcohol out of his system, but who had effected his first transfer of bunkers straight over the wall. On his second try he had given the ship a list that had made the Old Man himself scream with rage.

It wasn't MacReady's fault, either, that his First Assistant couldn't handle the black gang. None of this was MacReady's fault. But all of it was definitely his responsibility; it had kept him below in the thundering heat of the engine room almost constantly. His job was to keep her rolling.

"Keep her rolling, Mister," the Old Man had said, at their first mess. "I am, by God, taking this ship across, and I will have no straggling, you understand? No engine failures!"

MacReady had smiled inwardly. But it was the Captain's privilege to lay down prohibitions against the future behavior of the *Star Rosa's* engines, against the probable performance of two old Diesels now far past retirement age, and MacReady's face showed nothing but grave assent. He knew his job, MacReady. And he knew when to keep his mouth shut.

So it was carry the Second while the liquor dissolved from him—but tactfully, because the Second was a prideful man capable of good work; and it was carry the Third, and this not tactfully at all, because the Third was too far gone in the morass of fear to care. It was carry the First, whose day work was running a course of its own. It was carry the Juniors, irresolute as Juniors always are when they sense discord above.

And it was carry the Cadet, a mother's son with the down scarcely harshened on his cheeks—a bright young man who would never stop until he had four golden rings on his sleeve and his berth in a first-class liner. If he lived!

If he lived—if any of them lived through this. MacReady sighed and

let his underwear fall with a sodden plop about his ankles. He kicked the pile of clothing to one side and stretched, reveling in the moment of nakedness, in the feeling of nothing but cool air against his sweat-raw skin.

His hands groped of their own volition over his littered bunk for cigarettes. Ten days now since he'd slept between those white sheets. Ten days of being continually below. Ten days, with the U-boats coming closer in with each attack, each day daring more. Ten days of cat-naps on the hard settee, of reading the same detective story over and over again. Ten days, and only a beginning.

A warning twinge knifed through his right thigh, faded, then returned in a burst of savage pain that traveled up the thigh, around to his buttock, and up into the small of his back. Grimacing with agony, MacReady watched the muscles of his leg bunch slowly into a twisted mass, felt his back arch as though he were in the hands of an invisible giant.

Heat cramp! His teeth glinted in the harsh overhead light as he fought the racking spasms. His leg straightened away from him, a sculptured thing, marble-hard, with every detail of muscle and gorged vein showing. Blowing in a fury of pain, MacReady bent and pounded the thigh with his fist, and new cramps seized his belly,

dragging his head down to his knees. MacReady filled his chest and strained erect again, the cramps running wild through his tall long-boned frame; he lell to the deck writhing and trying for nothing now save breath.

He lay so for perhaps five minutes, coreset in ropy muscle, his own strength against him. Then the heat cramps ceased as mysteriously and suddenly as they had begun, and MacReady climbed wearily to his feet. Wrung out, he swayed and rolled against the edge of his bunk while his fingers resumed their interrupted groping for cigarettes.

Salt. He should have been taking his salt tablets regularly. MacReady's narrow bone-prominent face creased in a rueful smile; and then his hand caressed the tender skin of his shoulders. Salt prevented the cramps, all right, but for him it was not an easy alternative. MacReady was a red-head, and like many redheads his skin was milky white and delicate as a child's. Normal sweating in the engine room had made it sore enough; now that MacReady was spending so much time below, his skin felt as though it had been sandblasted. Salty sweat was another kind of agony.

But the cramps were dangerous. You had only to be caught like that once, in an emergency. A vagrant spasm chased up his arm, leaped to his face and twisted it into a hideous grimace before it relaxed its hold. MacReady hastily tossed the tablets into his mouth and washed them down. Then he stepped into his shower.

Ten minutes later he was stretched out on the settee, his skin eased by fresh water and soap and the feel of fresh denim. He flipped to his place in the detective story, dragging strongly at a cigarette, and wondered if sleep would come. His brain felt tight, brilliant with fatigue; and he knew that if he lay there long enough, and if nothing happened, some of the light would go out. That would be sleep, with every nerve in his body tensely expectant, eager to warn of a false beat or a slowing of revolutions from below, eager to inform MacReady of the thing he most feared.

Engine failure! The ship losing way as the comparative safety of the convoy passed her by. MacReady had made his personal terms with death; but he could not make terms with the idea of all her people becoming items of a submarine commander's luck and his own unmet responsibility.

THAT was when the bump came, and MacReady came awake from thoughts that had drifted to dreams and were threatening to become nightmare. It was an insignificant sound, as though the ship had struck and shouldered aside a floating oil-drum.

But gently, and through her whole length, she shivered.

MacReady's eyeballs felt gritty, and he realized that he had been sleeping once again with his eyes wide open. He worked the lids down painfully until tears gushed to relieve him, and his hand groped to the ashtray screwed to the edge of his bunk. There was only ash, where his cigarette had burned out, and he lit another.

There were then nine explosions, coming one after the other in a series of deep bass-cymbal crashes that shook the ship like a giant maul hammering at her hull. The overhead light flickered, and the big electric alarm bells started ringing—short, urgent, brain-searing bursts of sound.

On the settee, MacReady made a single convulsive movement as though stung by a whiplash. Then he was still, his body in mutiny, his mind cringing from one more onslaught of the bells.

In the alleyway, doors crashed open and voices sounded dimly through the alarm. Then the bells stopped, and MacReady moved suddenly, like a man who has been straining against a rope and broken it. In the vacuum of silence there was an echoing growl of explosions that rattled the ship's skeleton. Below, the engineers on watch had cut revolutions for fear of shaft whip; now the big Diesels were picking up again in ascending rhythm.

MacReady had swung his feet down into his shoes, and strode into the crowded alley. It was dim with blue light, and the men were shadowy and featureless, bulky in their lifejackets. A thin hysterical voice that MacReady recognized as the Third Engineer's was saying over and over: "We're hit. I tell ya we're hit. It's no use goin' below. We're hit."

There was a loud slapping sound, and the Third's voice ceased abruptly. The electrician shouldered out of the gloom, pulling on a pair of heavy leather gauntlets.

"That Third!" he said. Then he recognized MacReady. "I guess I shouldn't of smacked him, Chief. I only hit him with my glove, though."

A voice said nervously: "Hey, they sure dropped them ash cans close by, this time. I thought they got us myself."

"Must be chasin' the sub right through the convoy," somebody else said. His voice was shrill with fright.

MacReady was aware that he had forgotten his lifejacket. He said, "Cut the chatter and get below," and shouldered his way through the milling men. A burst of harsh metallic clangor and heat leaped forth as he swung the heavy steel engine-room door. Leaving it open, he ran over the cross-run and launched himself down the ladders. He went down

stiff-armed, sliding on the handrails on the heels of his hands, and going from grating to grating in long slicing swoops.

HEAT and noise wrapped about him as he went down. The engine room was a deep pit, quarried in steel, bright with raw light and thunderous with the sound of the enormous Diesels. The air reeked of hot lubricating oil and pulverized fuel oil, and was bitter with gases that rhythmically screamed their escape past the worn liners. A thermometer, swinging near an air-shaft, read one hundred and twelve degrees.

The Second Engineer, MacReady's alcoholic, was on the control platform with his Junior. MacReady joined them, his eyes raking the awkward and old-fashioned cluster of gauges for intelligence of the engines. The Second grinned at him, sweetly. His name was Hedrick. He was a barrel-shaped little man with a great deal of hair on his chest and a mane of it over his shoulders. He stood stolidly within reach of the throttles of the star-board engine and his Junior, imitating his stance, stood over the port controls.

There was no panic here, the way there was when the First or Third had an attack alarm on their watches. Things were under control, under good control; and MacReady experienced a moment of pleasure in recalling how he had sized up the rummy Hedrick and fought to keep him aboard when the Captain and the agents wanted him thrown ashore.

The rest of the engineers were coming down the ladders slowly, too slowly. Only the electrician hurried. He vaulted a handrail to get ahead of the others and ran along the high grating to his switchboard.

MacReady had opened his mouth to yell at the men when another pattern of depth charges started to go off. Here below the sound was different, a thunderous growl, a solid bolt of violent noise which could be heard moving rapidly away from its source, and which wound up to a high brassy crash. The ship shuddered with the successive blows and the atmosphere of the engine room, compressed by shock waves, beat on MacReady's ear drums. Lights flickered and a bulb arced out with a haunting blue flash. Hedrick shot a glance at his Junior and then put his hands on the throttles to ease her if her shalts started to whip.

Still on the ladders, the entire oil watch had stopped. Like forgotten puppets they clung to the handrails in that maelstrom of noise, their only movement a slight-swaying in concert with the rolling of the ship. Pattern after pattern was going down now

and the noise and vibration gave all the glittering array of machinery the look of things seen out of focus, in delirium.

Now MacReady did yell, pitching his voice to a sharp tenor note that wakened the quiescent figures on the ladders. He gesticulated violently, and the men moved, dreamlike, slowly down into the pit of heat and noise.

When the First Engineer came out on the control platform MacReady grabbed him by the shoulder.

"Make them get the lead out," he yelled into the First's ear.

The First turned a face pudgy with chronic fear. His shoulders moved in resignation. "Make 'em yourself," he howled back. The First looked at the gauges, seeing nothing, MacReady knew, and then moved apathetically to relieve the Junior at the port controls.

MacReady snapped, "Leave him be. Stand by here."

The First made another meaningless gesture and fed a cigarette into his face with trembling hands. The men were still moving slowly, reluctant to leave the little shelter they thought existed between the bulk of the main engines.

MACREADY felt a stab of temper race up his spine, burn in his brain. It made his legs stiff. It made him bang his heels against the floorplates as he strode toward them and he knew by the expression on the face of the man he grabbed that he was sinking his fingers to the bone.

"What the hell!" It was a Junior named Schell, a man older than the Chief. He wrenched away furiously and brought up his hands. The others stopped all pretense of going to their stations.

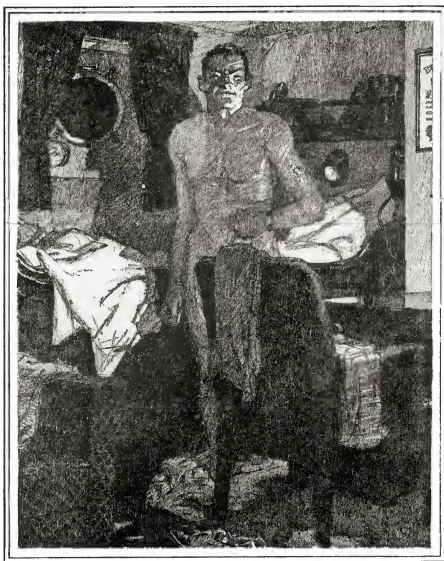
"Get on those pumps!" MacReady yelled.

Schell gave him a measuring look of insolence and the men crowded imperceptibly closer. MacReady could feel their fear transmuting itself into something else. Anger, the sudden desire to fight; the close and intimate and real contact of body to body; the calling up of passions that would for a moment blot out the terror that rode on every man's back.

MacReady knew all this, because it was part of his job to know these things; and he knew there were two ways to handle such a situation. But because he was at some kind of crisis point himself MacReady chose the easier way.

His right hand moved just enough to distract Schell's attention. Schell was big, heavily built and tall as the Chief. But he upended abruptly when MacReady's left took him in the mouth.

It had been an in-stepping blow,



Grimacing with agony, MacReady felt his back arch. Heat cramp!

and MacReady kept on walking. He kicked Schell with a contempt that was only in the action and went straight for the men. They huddled together, their faces expressionless blobs, and in the fiery tumult of his temper MacReady could hear a calmer part of him saying: *This is wrong, all wrong. You won't get it out of them this way.*

Another pattern started tolling its underwater cannonade and the approaching faces shimmered like reflections in a wind-blown pool. There was the tingle of shock and the throb of compression and out of that knot of white faces and opening mouths a single sound cut into the engine-room roar. It was a sound like a whipped dog, the cry of a mind teetering on the edge of abyss.

That saved MacReady—saved him from wading into that incipient mutiny, saved him from smashing his own men either into unwilling obedience or open revolt.

He fixed on the man who had cried out. It was Eddie White, his Third, and Eddie now had his knuckles pressed hard against his mouth and his whole body was shaking.

"Eddie," the Chief said. "Eddie." His hand fell on the Third's shoulder firmly but with none of the fierce anger that had possessed MacReady the moment before. He turned Eddie so that he could speak loudly into his ear.

"You're supposed to be on the CO₂ hose, Eddie. Up there." He pointed to the big drum near the top grating and gave Eddie a little push. Eddie stumbled up the ladder. It was not the Third's station, really, but MacReady knew that flooded compartments were more likely than fire at this point and had put the Junior Third on the pumps as the best of a doubtful choice.

The men melted away to their stations. Schell had picked himself up and gone, his belligerence faded to

sheepishness. The Cadet eased past the Chief and took his place at the telegraphs and MacReady made a slow circuit of both main engines. When he had checked on all pumps and seen that a second Diesel generator was on the board he went aft to the shaft-alley door. It was a heavy section of steel that slid downward and now it was nearly closed. There was just enough clearance for a man to squeeze under.

MacReady went through. It was a dangerous thing to do; foolhardy, almost theatrical. But MacReady felt that the time was ripe for a gesture. By now all hands below would know that the Chief had gone into the shaft alley alone.

This was the toughest place of all to be in an attack. The twin tunnels, lying just above the tanks' tops and the very keel of *Star Rosa*, stretched aft in sharply dwindling perspective. Roofed over, scaled off from the holds through which they passed, they were a remote and cloacal part of the anatomy of the ship.

MacReady was in the starboard tunnel. A row of bulbs lit the place and in their light the huge shaft, big around as a man's waist, turned and winked in its pedestal bearings. It was cooler here, cloistered and remote from the hysteria of engine-room noises. The shaft made its own sound, a simple rumble; and the shaft itself was a simple thing. Yet it was to this plain shaft that the whole complex of men and machinery in the engine room was transmitted.

The place was a death trap. A torpedo hit now anywhere between the forward engine room and the stern of the ship would fill it with pulping concussion, rushing water. There was an escape hatch aft, a straight square vertical shaft through which a man might climb to the deck. If a man could reach it in time—if it remained clear after the blow. MacReady had seen a man taken out of an escape hatch once, in a shipyard. The ship had come in down by the stern with her watertight doors dogged tight and an oiler in there somewhere. They cut into the junk the torpedo had made of her stern and they found the oiler, blue-dead, jammed against the ladder. Dead of cold, dead of injuries; but mostly dead of terror and loneliness, entombed in steel.

THE Chief took his time. He walked slowly down the shaft alley, every step taking him farther into physical loneliness. He felt each bearing, carefully, sliding his tough sensitive engineer's hand around the metal, adjusting the feed wicks. At the end of the alley the shaft disappeared, glanded and dripping. Mac-



Schell gave him a measuring look of insolence and the men crowded

Ready felt this stern gland, felt the cold sea pressing through. He looked at the afterwell, and then he crossed to the other alley.

He went back as slowly. Somewhere along his way the blind pursuit through the convoy passed near them again. The patterns went down and the ship shuddered as the intolerable blows struck at her. In the shaft alley it was very loud and the compression swayed him as he stood lightly balanced on the balls of his feet, his head down. MacReady swallowed rapidly to ease the violent pressure shift on his eardrums, and MacReady's nerves, that had made no terms at all with death, twitched hot-

ly and tried to make him run. A sardonic expression of self-mockery settled on his lean face; but when he finally emerged into the engine room his lips were pulled back from his teeth in a bitter grin. He saw what he had known he'd see—what he'd hoped not to see.

The men who were supposed to be standing by the pumps and the generators had drifted together between the main engines. When they saw MacReady they started moving back to their stations, resentfully. The only one not huddling with the group was a tough oiler named Jake Madsen. With his back to the Chief he was bent over, feeling the thrust



closer, their fear transmuting itself into the sudden desire to fight.

bearing of the starboard engine. When he straightened up he turned and came tramping toward the shaft alley with a set expression on his battered face.

MacReady said: "It's okay, Jake." The oiler looked at him, eyes level. "My job, Chief," he said in a hoarse voice. He ducked under the door and MacReady felt warmth for him.

He walked slowly forward between the main engines. The First drifted to one side, pretending not to see him; and the Cadet, who liked bright conversation with the Chief, became interested in his bell book. The harsh grin on MacReady's face tightened.

Heat struck through the coolness his clothes had gathered in the shaft alleys and the sweat burst out of him anew, like a million barbs. He stopped at the controls, fished for cigarettes in his shirt pockets. Hedrick, the Second, offered a pack. MacReady took one and passed them to the Junior. The three men smoked, rocking in gentle unison with the ship's motion.

Here MacReady felt some integration. On either side of him tons of iron and steel were in violent and controlled motion. It was from this point that he felt the massive engines, all the auxiliaries, as extensions of himself. It was a union achieved

in time, in labor, in knowledge. It was a rapport long since become instinct, a final identification of man with machine.

The thin edge of scorn intruded into his thought. Scorn for the uneasy men, the frightened men, the half-hearts. Even the Second could be relied upon only when he was far away from a bottle.

The bell interrupted him with the signal for dismissal. The First wiped his face, ludicrous and pathetic in his relief. Without a backward glance he mounted the ladder, leaving the rest of the oil watch to secure. They were close on his heels. Only the Cadet lingered, with some kind of bravado; and then only until he realized that he was being ignored.

The three men smoked their cigarettes without attempting to talk. Jake Madsen came rolling along the control platform, his face still set and tough. He mopped around his mouth with a sweat rag and lit a cigarette.

MacReady knew men like Jake Madsen. They were seamen of the old school, men who considered it undignified and even beneath them to attempt to fraternize with officers. Men like Madsen judged officers harshly, against a rigorous standard; but whether they respected their officers or despised them made no difference to their own work. The Jake Madsens of the sea performed their duties to the letter, always.

MACREADY crushed out his cigarette in the brass box on the log desk. He tipped a finger to the Junior, who had stayed at the controls while the Second started an inspection round, and started up the ladder. Somewhere not far away a great door slammed. *Star Rosa* leaped as she never had to the depth charges and the door slammed again, and again.

Torpedoes. Hitting ships close by. MacReady felt himself knotting inside with sick expectancy as he ran for the controls. The bells started their frenetic ringing again, there was a high, blinding explosion that pushed him down to his knees. Something toppled from the first grating and crashed to the floor-plates. It was Hedrick and the barrel-shaped man rolled over and over and carried the Junior with him. There was another explosion and after it the high blasting hiss that told of a cracked air line.

Mouth open, the Chief heaved to his feet. The red light over the telephone set winked commandingly. He jammed the headset over his ears, spinning valves, searching the gauges, aware of a settling cloud of dense gray smoke.



"Chief!" It was the Captain's voice. "There's a regular wolf pack in here."

"Chief!" It was the Captain's voice. "There's a regular wolf pack in here. One's surfaced and shelling. You better be lively on the controls down there. You hear me, Mister?"

"Okay," MacReady croaked.

Jake Madsen materialized out of the gray haze. "The Second's hurt!" he yelled.

"I'll take care of him." MacReady grabbed Jake's shoulder and pointed to the shaft-alley door. "Shut it, tight!"

THE Second was lying in a ball, jerking convulsively. His mouth formed the word "Wind," and he pointed to his stomach. The Junior, lying on his back, had had more than his wind knocked out. A jagged piece of steel protruded from behind his collar bone and he would never stand alertly at the controls again.

MacReady let the head down gently. The main engines were struggling titanically, the dimming lights showed that the generator Diesel was slowing. Soon the whole plant would die for lack of air, precious compressed air that was blasting to waste in the atmosphere.

He ran, tripping and stumbling over debris the shell hits had brought down. Behind the port engine hot water rained down from the pierced cooling system. He slipped easily on the wet plates, not realizing until he put a leg up on the generator grating that one of his knees was numb and bleeding. His hands flew over the valves.

Star Rosa was firing back with her stern gun now. MacReady could recognize the distinctive thud and bang of it, and it was a comforting sound. He had started a second generator by now, hearing with relief the deep chuckle of it as he swung the starting lever, the bark of its relief valves. Then he was down and running again, the sequence of what had yet to be done clear in his mind. The orders, the organization . . .

But where were the men? He swung around the end of the engine to the control platform, expecting to see them coming down, ready to signal the electrician at the board, to put the Cadet on the bridge phone. Men, men, he needed men to start the compressor, the pumps; he needed men at the controls, he needed men with tools.

There were no men. The ladders were empty.

A third shell hit the engine-room space. The hit was still high because the submarine's gun mount had been damaged and could not be depressed enough for this close work, but MacReady could not know this. All MacReady knew was the flash and the simultaneous terrible concussion and

the rain of twisted steel and glass. When it stopped he pulled himself to his feet and raced desperately up the ladder to the board.

Jake Madsen was sitting there with a leg crumpled under him. He made an okay sign and pointed to the board and MacReady saw that the generator he'd started was already cut in. Jake shook his head when the Chief bent over him.

"Keep her rollin', Chief," he said.

MacReady threw himself back down the ladder. He landed with his hand cupped over his knee. Of his three best men two were knocked out and one dead. And nobody else coming below.

They weren't coming below. Not a one of them! All the rawness, the ineptitude, the inchoate panic—all come to a head now. Anger flamed in him, burned to a sad bitter ash. He should have known this was the way it would be. Even the electrician. Laboring over the auxiliary compressor, MacReady wished the electrician were standing by the board; and he wondered whose face he was slapping now, masterfully, with the leather gauntlet.

A telegraph brassily summoned him just as he got the big compressor making air. Port full astern, it demanded. The starboard telegraph jangled for more speed ahead. In that shambles of sinking ships and submarines such a maneuver could only mean collision was imminent.

COLLISION! MacReady leaped for the controls. The blasting hiss above him was getting louder and a glance at the gauges told him that his injection air was making up. But the pressure was still dangerously low. He found himself wincing. Wincing at the thought of collision, wincing at the thought of what would happen if the cracked air line carried away.

The port engine had sobbed to a stop as he cut its fuel. MacReady's hand clenched achingly over the reverse lever as though by his own strength he could speed the ponderous reverse ram, the swing of the push rods. Time seemed suspended in that leisured mechanical movement. It announced its completion with a high shriek of exhausting air and he jerked over the control wheel. More air was released, starting air this time; a controlled tornado hurtling against the immobility of the engine. There was a moment of struggle, then the engine thundered into life. *Star Rosa* rattled like a truck on a rough road as the backing propeller took hold and sent its turbulent race under her hull. MacReady shoved all throttles to the limit.

The ship was now shaking violently with the powerful opposed mo-

tions. The atmosphere pulsed, hot, wet, weighty. MacReady moved his shoulders under his soaked shirt. It made his skin smart and he looked down at his knee that thrust bloodily out of his pants and let the hurt of that reach him. His eyes darted to the gauges and his fingers fumbled at a crushed pack of cigarettes and he was aware that he was doing all these things to keep his mind off the fact that thousands of horsepower were straining to swing the ship away from a danger he could not see.

SHE wallowed, coming about like that in the seaway, and MacReady lit two cigarettes and limped quickly to where the Second Assistant was lying.

The Second had rolled over now on his back. He smiled bashfully at the Chief and pointed to his stomach and his mouth again framed the word "Wind." But he had the pallor of shock and could hardly hold the cigarette MacReady thrust at him.

The telegraphs called him back. It was all ahead full and the renewed thud and bang of the deck gun came as a surprise to him. In his anxiety over the engines he had not noticed the cessation of fire. Now it was renewed with fury and *Star Rosa* trembled like a whipped beast as death probed anew at her hull.

A man made his terms with death. He made up his mind. Intellectually, he put death in a niche. Death was a fact of life, he told himself. He assured himself that it was one with the other mysterious facts of life: like birth, like sleep, like wanting a woman, like the desire to be a marine engineer that might very well have been the desire to be an insurance salesman or a priest.

The mind made its terms, tidily. But the mind forgot one thing about death. Death was final. Death was the end of all facts of life. And when the mind remembered that the mind closed and astatic man took over. The memory of a thousand thousand generations flowed in the bloodstream, lingered in the nervous system, the memory that told a man to fight death, or run from it.

But never stand in a pit of steel, sunk in the ocean's depth; never stand in heat and noise and unleashed power, passively waiting . . .

MacReady pulled his head up sharply and passed his hand across his face. It felt funny, his mouth opening like that, square, his cheeks rigid and wet. His spine felt intolerably itchy, as though he were being tickled, and his legs and arms were crawling with it. MacReady never knew how he found himself at the base of the ladder, his hands locked over the handrails, forcibly holding

himself back, a man physically fighting with himself.

The telegraphs saved him from that overwhelming panic. They clanged and he went to the controls automatically and when the last shell exploded in the engine room the blast of it served him as the electrician's glove had served the Third Assistant. He sank to his knees under it and when he pulled himself up a great tide of dirty red and yellow fire was pouring down the after bulkhead. It splashed on the footplates and into the bilges; then another wave of it came down and rolled along the control platform, making a lot of smoke. Hedrick was lying in its path.

The signals had called for half speed. MacReady finished adjusting the throttles and swayed toward him. The little man seemed very heavy; the best the Chief could do was grab him under the shoulders and skid him backward to the foot of the ladder. There was a foam extinguisher there. He took it and went back, feeling now as though he were wading through chest-high water, and he blasted the lapping fire away from the Junior's body and dragged that, too, to the foot of the ladder.

He went back again, with the foam extinguisher, and he did what he could with it until it was exhausted. The engines bellowed on indestructibly. A starting air-tank safety valve went off with a sustained roar and the sound of the telephone bell drilled through to him. It rang twice and was silent because the fire was surrounding it but MacReady knew what they wanted.

They wanted water on deck because they probably had fires on deck too. The thought came to him languidly, as from a great distance, and it was hard to attach any importance to it. The thick black smoke, that had been so acrid and choking, was bland now and anesthetic. Not aware that he was crawling, not hearing the tearing intake of his own breath, he thought himself drifting lightly around the front of the engine and over to the pumps. The valves were very stiff to work, stiffer than he could remember them, and the switch very far away. Hard to reach, that switch. But he reached it and swung the handle and he could hear the raw sound of the gears as the pump began delivering water to the fire lines.

HE drifted back to the control platform. He wished Jake Madsen and the Second would stop yelling. It was no good, being down here at a time like this, and nobody knew it better than he. But he wished they would stop that yelling.

Everything was still running. He'd kept her rolling. But she wouldn't

roll much longer. She needed men. Men to rescue her from the fire. Men to stem her damage. Men yelling to each other, reassuringly. Men on the ladders. Men on the floorplates. Eddie White with that CO² hose. The First, apathetic no longer, taking charge the way he was supposed to do. Men who would, just for a little while, take the burden of her away from him.

That Schell. Schell was a big man. A hell of a big man. No trick at all for Schell to get the Chief over his shoulder, to carry him up the ladders.

FACES of men in the smoke, crowding to one side to let Schell past. Figures of men running along the gratings. And then the alleyway, dim, and the cool plates under his back. A long quiet, and other men laid beside him. The flame of a cutting torch down the alley.

Schell standing over him, and the tearing harshness in his throat as he rasped words.

"What goes on?" MacReady said.

Schell grinned, his white teeth a sudden gleam. "We got kinda boxed in here," he said. "The whole damn black gang. That first shot smashed the engine-room casing so we couldn't get through and the second one jammed the door to the deck. Lucky we could get at the cutting torch. We were sure trapped."

MacReady jerked to a sitting position, questions in his eyes. Schell pushed him back. "Take it easy, Chief," he said. "We got Madsen out. And the Second. You been kayoed quite a while. They're right here beside you." Schell squatted down. "Everything's under control, Chief," he said. "The First told me to tell you. And they're all right on deck too. We talked to them through the skylights."

MacReady lay back. After a while he said, wonderingly:

"And you cut through to the engine room first?"

"Sure," Schell said. "We had to go below, didn't we? You didn't think we'd leave you guys all alone down there, did you?"

"No," MacReady lied. "It never crossed my mind."

Schell grinned again. "We were just about scared silly," he said. "It's hell, not knowing what's really happening."

"I know what you mean," MacReady said. He felt a sudden and deep humility. "I know just what you mean."

The men at the jammed door had burned away the hinges and the flaps of crumpled steel. Schell joined them and, heaving together, they burst the door outward. Fresh sweet air and dawn light flooded in. THE END

The Awful



The idea was to show the guy something about the hazards of family life. But—the best-laid plans gang aft agley.

by B. M. ATKINSON, Jr.

FRIEND, I have just returned from a little jaunt that for horrors ranks second only to Dante's trip to the Inferno. It was not a total loss, however, as I discovered two great truths: One, where family vacations are concerned, a father can't win, no matter what. Two, when any bachelors are to be exposed, leave it to the vice squad.

A bachelor was responsible for the whole business. I wanted to make certain that he remained a bachelor, so I framed him into taking this twelve-hundred-mile trip in the same car with me, my wife, my sister Jean, my five-year-old daughter, my three-year-old daughter, my two-year-old son, my ten-year-old dog and a year-and-a-half-old rooster. (Yes, I thought it a splendid scheme at the time.)

Now, this bachelor was known variously as John Bagshaw, Jolly John Bagshaw, Whisky John Bagshaw, Etchings Bagshaw, the Passionate Photographer, the Magnificent Obsession. He worked for the same paper I did, and the reason I wanted him to remain a bachelor was simple enough. He was about to marry my sweet, innocent little sister Jean.

It all started that black day when, in a moment of great Christian charity, I allow Jolly John to speak to her. That's all it takes. She is so different from the temple dancers he has been running with, that he loses his head, heart and what is laughingly referred to as his soul. In a few short months he has convinced her that he is a parlay of Mother Goose, Father Flanagan and Daddy Longlegs. A man who

Journey of Jolly John

Illustrated by
CHARLES CHICKERING



just wants to sit by the fire, putter in the petunias and raise children—lots of children.

He is quite distressed when I won't buy it. "Ed," he rages, "I'm a changed man. 'Devotion' Bagshaw, they call me now. A finer husband you couldn't find for your sister."

"John," I say, "I want to believe you, but a wee small voice within me keeps quoting the old Bagshaw. To wit: 'The hot blood of the Bagshaws cools only when diluted with embalming fluid. . . . 'Children are the sober man's d.t.'s.' . . . 'The woman who takes Bagshaw out of circulation will be assassinated leaving the church.' Just be a brother to me, John, not a brother-in-law."

That's the way matters stand when I hit upon my brilliant plan to expose

him for what he is. I lure him into it by suggesting that he and Jean and my wife Ann and I go to Fort Myers on our vacation. I state most emphatically that my mother will keep the children. That's my gimmick. He's been putting on this act about how he loves 'em, but I notice that he takes the greatest of care never to spend more than five minutes at a time with them. He keeps playing it that way.

"You mean the kiddies can't go with us?" he moans. "Why, their Uncle Baggy would take care of them."

"No, Uncle Baggy," I say. "I know you love children, but Daddy Ed's nerves would just snap off at their little roots. They stay at home with dear old Granny."

He's sold. So is my wife when I explain my strategy. She shudders every time she thinks of some poor girl marrying somebody who works for a newspaper. However, she thinks I'm carrying things too far when the fateful morning of departure rolls around, and I include Hindenburg and Chanticleer in the crew.

"We'll ship 'em back from Tennessee," I tell her. "Jolly John will have fled to some monastery by then."

Hindenburg is a large and surly Dobermann Pinscher. He's in his dotage, and his only pleasure in life is intimidating Jolly John. Chanticleer came to us as an Easter chick and unfortunately survived the season to become a large arrogant unsanitary bird loved only by Mistress Mary, my five-year-old. She has a regular harness for him, so we hitch him on to his perch in the back of the station wagon.

After we get our menagerie settled, Mistress Mary, Lanny, the three-year-old, and Tom, the two-year-old, fight their way aboard. We're all set for the great adventure into the well-known. We pick up Jean around seven. I tell her that to make sure Uncle Baggy enjoys himself, we decided at the last minute to bring the children along. She's delighted. In other words she has never vacationed with them before. When we pull up in front of Jolly John's place, I tell the children to hide in the bottom of the car.

"We'll have a real nice surprise for good old Uncle Baggy," I say.

I go in and find him packed and r'aring to go. "Ah, Ed," he says as we come down the walk, "this is going to do us both a lot of good. You and I both been awfully jumpy lately—you know it?"

"Yeah," I say, "two glorious weeks. No cares, no worries, no pressure."

Then he sees Jean looking out at us, and he says real loud: "Still wish you had brought the kids along, though."

I feel like Pandora lifting the lid when I open the car door. They all pop up screaming: "Uncle Baggy! Uncle Baggy! We're going with you,

Uncle Baggy. Sit by me, Uncle Baggy, sit by me." Blah, blah, blah! Uncle Baggy staggers back. "Well, well, well," he manages to gurgle, "isn't this going to be merry! Ed, you old dog, why didn't you tell me?"

He stumbles in the door. There's a nasty growl, and he bounces back. "Good old Hindenburg!" he gasps.

"Yep," I say, "and good old Chanticleer too!" That just about does it. He's ready to plead a death-bedded relative, cholera, anything. He doesn't want any part of that snake pit on wheels. But he's trapped, and he knows it. He stalls around hoping I'm going to tell him to sit in the front seat with me, but Mistress Mary and Lanny won't hold still for it. He's got to sit on the middle seat with them.

It's a great line-up: Ann, Chanticleer and Tom on the back seat, them on the middle seat, and Jean and Hindenburg and I on the front seat. Noah would have loved us. When we take off, Jolly John has the same happy expression on his face that Evangeline did when she pulled out of Acadia.

THE first hundred miles are a big disappointment. My children turn into regular little stoics, and we don't have to stop at filling stations but three times. And they get the strange idea that they can see just as well sitting down as they can hanging by their heels out the window. Of course they scale Mount Bagshaw a few times; but still being in shock, he doesn't notice it.

Jean thinks he's just wonderful, the way he handles children. (It's the same technique a mouse would use handling two cats.) Then she gets to gushing about all the children they're going to have. Her eyes get real shiny, and Uncle Baggy's get real glassy.

It's so sickening I resort to a very low trick. The middle seat in a station wagon has lots of leverage, and a sudden jamming of the brakes will toss the occupants just about over the front seat. Naturally, with three bodies coming through the air at him, Hindenburg gets quite excited and sounds like he is going to make a meal out of the body with a beard on it.

The jolt also throws Chanticleer off his perch, and what with the flapping and the growling and the little ones threatening their way through his legs, it is not long before Jolly John is not so jolly any more. Neither is my wife, as Chanticleer makes a forced landing on her head at one stop, so I have to ration my brake work.

After lunch, though, the status starts getting quo again. They start hanging out the windows. Jolly John gets so tired of retrieving them, he

just lets them anchor their feet in his pockets and go to it. Then Lanny begins chanting: "Westwood, westwood, gotta go to westwood!" I'm convinced she's got radar in her organs the way she can pick out stretches with no filling stations. By three o'clock their unrest has reached a peak. Jolly John is fidgeting like a man sitting in a bed of worms.

I decide to finish him off right quick by stopping for some ice-cream. There is nothing that will unravel nerves faster than sitting in the midst of three children who have double-dip chocolate cones under attack. Especially if there's a good hot wind whipping through the car, and you've got on a nice white shirt.

Jolly John plays it pretty smart, though. As soon as Lanny starts getting it in her eyebrows, he mounts her on his knee. This puts her cone three-eighths of an inch from the base of my skull, and every time we hit a bump, it's like being nuzzled by an Eskimo. Chanticleer comes through, though, trying to take a peck out of Tom's cone. Tom jerks it away and catches Jolly John flush on the ear: The only man in captivity with a chocolate-coated eardrum.

Then comes what is known to the strait-jacket trade as the Children's Hour. They're hungry, bored, beat-up and ready to call it a day. They start whining in three different keys. It has the same invigorating effect on the nervous system as running a file over a broken tooth. Ann starts window shopping for a place to stop.

"Just any place," she snarls. Being a bachelor, Jolly John is fool enough to believe her. He doesn't know there's nothing in the world as particular as a hungry, wrought-up mother of three seeking a haven for the night. She's like a cat about to have kittens. There's something wrong with every place she looks at.

After about fifty miles I spot a fairly decent-looking place, and head in despite the roar from Madame Duncan Hines. We have supper, and then I stagger off to the cabin I'm sharing with Jolly John. He ain't beat up enough. Jean has to take him for a nice long moonlight walk. Around nine he stumbles in, hits the bed and quivers like a jellyfish in labor.

"Ed," he wheezes, "how long you figure it's going to take us to get there at this rate?"

"Well," I say, "this was a pretty good day. The children were on their good behavior, and we didn't have to stop but fifteen times or so. However—"

"A good day!" he gasps.

"Yeah," I say. "Their second and third day out they get a little restless. With you nursing 'em like you've been

doing, though, we ought to make it in four days."

He weaves over to my bottle of bourbon on the dresser and pours himself an awesome dose. That is quite a pleasant surprise, as he's been on the wagon ever since he started going with Jean. We both go to work on the bottle. Whether we're drinking to forget the past or the future, I don't know.

NEXT morning he's got a stomach like a churn and a head like a percolator. Everybody else is ghoulishly gay, but all he can do is roll his big, glassy blue eyes at me. Then he tones up his system by stepping on Hindenburg's paw when he gets in the car. Fortunately Hindenburg has lost most of his major molars and he does nothing more than gum one of Jolly John's legs quite roundly. His enthusiasm for the job, though, rather upsets Jolly John.

"Bv thunder," he roars, "if that mushmouth monster ever lays another gum on me, I'm gonna tear his tongue out and flail him to death with it."

Hindenburg isn't impressed, but Mistress Mary sets up such a howl that her Aunt Jean has to assure her that Uncle Baggy was just joking. That makes me wonder just how blind love can get. Due to the bad blood between man and beast, Uncle Baggy and his two little pilot fish have to shift to the back seat with Chanticleer. As soon as we start off, they want to play games.

"Lanny, you and Mistress Mary listen to me," he pleads. "Uncle Baggy didn't sleep too well last night. If you'll just let him take a little nap, he'll buy you all the ice-cream you can eat."

That's how desperate he is. My children bribe awfully easy and in less than a minute there is naught to be heard but Uncle Baggy's heavy wheezing. I'm not worried, though; in the mirror I see Mistress Mary and Lanny whispering and looking Uncle Baggy over like a couple of undertakers.

All of a sudden he comes up flailing his arms and screeching. "My Lord," he says, pawing at his lace, "don't ever do that again!"

"John Bagshaw!" Jean gasps, "what in the world has happened to you?"

Mistress Mary and Lanny are cringing. "All I did was run a little stick up his nose," Mistress Mary says. "We wanted to find out what made those funny noises."

"Well, keep out of my nose," Jolly John snaps. "How would you like for me to run things up your nose? A nice big marble, maybe."

"John," Jean gasps again, "what's come over you?"

Chanticleer saves the day. He leans over from his perch and drills Jolly



Funniest thing they ever saw, Uncle Baggy grabbing his head that way.

John right in the back of the head. As he has a beak on him like a vulture, Jolly John comes a foot off the seat. Mistress Mary and Lanny howl. Funniest thing they ever saw, Uncle Baggy jumping up and grabbing his head that way. The pressure's off. Everybody but Jean relaxes. She is very much disturbed at the large patches of ogre that are beginning to show through her Prince Charming's make-up.

Within thirty seconds Chanticleer lets Jolly John have it again. More howls. What it is about Jolly John's skull that fascinates Chanticleer I don't know, but within the next fifty miles he rocks him about six more times.

Jolly John ain't speaking. He's acting like a spoiled child—one with a migraine headache being beat over the head with a bat. That love-light in Jean's eyes is getting dimmer all the time. Life is very beautiful, and then all of a sudden it very much ain't. I'm still laughing over Chanticleer's latest strike when I look up, and there's a large, nonchalant cow crossing the road right in front of me.

I jam on the brakes, and all hell breaks loose. I get Tom draped around my neck. Jean is under the dashboard. Ann is riding Hindenburg piggy-back. Mistress Mary and Lanny are bouncing and screeching in the rear, and somewhere in the middle of the mess somebody is using some very strong language. I look out between Tom's legs in time to see the cow saunter on across the road.

AFTER A round-robin medical survey and several nasty lectures on the art of navigation, I get ready to proceed. Then there's this horrible screech from Mistress Mary. "Where's Chanticleer? Where's Chanticleer? Chanticleer's gone!" Sure enough, the jolt has busted the strap to his harness, and he has evidently taken off through the window.

Just as all three of 'em start wailing, I show 'em Chanticleer about fifty yards off, heading into some woods. Jolly John to the rescue! "Don't you cry now, Mistress Mary," he says real comfortingly, "Uncle Baggy will bring him back for you. You dry those tears, now, and quit scream-

ing in Uncle Baggy's ear." He's a changed man.

I want to go with him, but he says too many of us will scare Chanticleer. He squares his shoulders and takes off as if he's going after the Holy Grail. I'm afraid the boy is about to make a nice mark for himself. Five minutes go by. Ten minutes. Twenty. Finally Jean looks at me kinda suspiciously and says she's joining the search. I refuse to be left alone with my wife and children. Jean follows Jolly John's trail, and I skirt the woods down to the left, thinking maybe Chanticleer will break out into the open.

In ten minutes I'm stranded in a bunch of briars. Then I hear the horn blowing, and I head back. There Jolly John and Jean are at the car, and Mistress Mary is carrying on over Chanticleer. Jolly John gives me quite a thrilling account of the roundup.

After we start off, though, I notice that Jean is awfully grim and not giving Jolly John the homage due a hero who has just captured a man-eating rooster singlehanded.



You'd think they were just coming back from a picnic.

"What happened in the woods," I ask her. "What really happened?"

"He was *t-h-r-o-w-i-n-g r-o-c-k-s* at Chanticleer!" she says, spelling it out to spare the children the shock.

"That's a *d-a-m-n* lie," Jolly John snarls.

"I guess I saw you," Jean snaps. "I just couldn't believe it. A grown man *s-t-o-n-i-n-g* a child's pet."

"You're crazy. I was throwing them over his head, trying to turn him!"

"Well, why were you screaming 'Shoo!' at the top of your voice?"

"John," I gasp, "you weren't really—"

"You shut up," he snarls. "You've been trying to run him down with your car for a year now. You told me so yourself."

That really lowers the temperature. The only conversation for the next fifty miles is supplied by Lanny and Mistress Mary. They keep crawling all over Uncle Baggy, thanking him for rescuing their chicken. At the next stop they all pile out and leave me alone with the villain.

"Well," he leers, "your little scheme is working out dandy, isn't it, Eddie boy? By thunder, you won't—"

"Now, John," I say, "it's all for your own good. I just wanted to prove to you that you weren't ready for the fireside yet. You're still just a hot-blooded young man. Your mind and your nerves just haven't matured enough yet for children and chickens and—"

He looks at me real nasty and then he says: "All right, you remember that last crack, now. I'm gonna give you a dose of it, brother. And don't come begging me for any nerve-graft when it's all over."

In a couple of minutes I'm beginning to appreciate the monster's capacity for treachery. He gets Lanny and Mistress Mary and moves them up to the middle seat so they'll be right on top of me. Then he turns into the old music master. He conducts them through their whole repertoire, which ranges from "Who Killed Cock Robin" to "Jesus Loves Me, This I Know." After they murder their little hymn for the fifth time, I'm ready to dive through the windshield.

Then he really gets degenerate. He teaches them "Old MacDonald Had a Farm," a song that I have gagged over since early childhood. They quack-quack here, they moo-moo there, they oink-oink, gobble-gobble, baa-baa until I start looking around for a screwdriver. Punctured eardrums would be cheap at that price.

To finish us off, he comes up with "Old MacDonald Had a Zoo," words and music by Bagshaw. It really sends 'em. MacDonald has got more animals than all the Ringlings and the Barnums and the Barleys ever had. They roar, they grunt, they trumpet, they scream and they screech, and then the hyena comes in for an encore. That's their favorite. A combination of a scream, a giggle and a long-drawn-out laugh, until my flesh crawls.

Hindenburg gives up. He just lies on the seat and whimpers. Chanticleer cringes in his corner. Ann is about to start loaming at the mouth, and Jean just gets madder and madder. "John Bagshaw, this Uncle Remus act isn't going to do you a bit of good," she snarls. "You've already shown your true colors."

There ain't any haggling over where we're going to stop that night; except for Uncle Baggy and his choral

group, we're all ready to settle for a crust of bread, a little morphine and a nice cozy grave. I sleep very poorly, having a series of nightmares about MacDonald and his herd of hyenas.

The next day it's the same thing. Jolly John is just cutting his own throat, though; Jean is really through with him. She thinks that he has ruined the trip for us. She doesn't know that he's booby-trapped us with our own dynamite.

By the grace of God and the fact that the trio gets so hoarse they can't sing any longer, we make it across the Florida line and pull up at a nice quiet motel set back in some woods.

After supper I'm lying across the bed telling Jolly John how comforting it is that the danger of him becoming my brother-in-law has completely passed. He's so burned up he says that he is going to wait and marry Mistress Mary, so he can call me "Daddy." Then, right in the middle of my scholarly reply, the door flies open and Jean busts in. She's crying and carrying on something awful.

"Mary and Lanny are lost," she sobs. "They've gone off in those awful woods, and I know they're—" She breaks down and starts sobbing so that you can't tell what she's saying. I make a grab for her, but Jolly John shoves me away. He puts his arm around her and tries quieting her.

"All right, honey," he says, "just take it easy now. It can't be all that bad. What's happened?"

"It was all my fault," she wails. "I went off and left them. We were in the woods back of the cottage and gathering some moss, and then I had to come back to the cottage for something. Ann and I got to talking and—and when I went back out, they were gone. It's all my fault. Please find 'em. I can't—" She starts sobbing again.

"Will you stop bawling!" I bellow at her. "Which way did—"

"Shut up," Jolly John snarls. "Baby, everything's going to be all right now. You stop that crying. We'll whistle 'em up in no time. They'll come to their Uncle Baggy."

SHE looks up at him like he's a blend of St. George and J. Edgar Hoover. I grab 'em both and pull 'em out the door. Ann is down in the woods carrying on worse than Jean did. It's pitiful the way she's screaming for those children. We try calming her down, but she's read too many folders on Florida's bountiful wildlife. While we're debating which way to hunt, the manager of the motel and a bunch of the guests come back.

We all fan out and head down through the pines. We go as far as they possibly could have gone in that

time but not a trace of 'em. The ground is carpeted with pine needles and we can't find a track any place. I'm really sick and to make it worse Jean and Ann are stumbling along behind me, both of 'em just about hysterical. Then the motel manager says for us to swing down to the left while he goes and calls the Sheriff to bring his dogs out.

We don't do any good on the swing to the left. We shift down to the right. Same thing. It's pitch black by then and the wind is beginning to pick up and the pines to kinda moan. We get back to our starting place and argue about whether to make a deeper drive straight ahead. All of a sudden Jean whimpers: "Where's John?"

I look around. No Jolly John. Then I holler for him. No Jolly John. "Now where the devil can that fool be!" I scream. "He couldn't have got lost with all of us along."

"Well," says one of the fellows who works around the motel, "there's a deep sink-hole somewheres out there in them woods. He coulda fell in it."

I want to choke him. Ann is positive that Mistress Mary and Lanny are at the bottom of it. She starts in all over again. The womenfolks try to quiet her and I take our cheerful friend aside to ask him about the place. Just as he starts mumbling something I hear this very faint, very weird sound. At first I think it's just a screech owl. Then I get it clearer. I tell everybody to shut up and listen.

They hear it too. Ann looks like she's going to faint. It's the strains of "Old MacDonald Had a Farm"—coming from the swamp. We all

start running. . . . Black water, roots and muck knee-deep! But the singing is getting louder.

Then we see the flickering of this flashlight. They're coming up this path through the swamp that we've overlooked. Jolly John has got 'em both in his arms but you can't tell who's who. They're all three covered from head to foot with mud. But it doesn't seem to bother them. The way they're carrying on you'd think they were just coming back from a picnic. I have never heard prettier singing or seen a more beautiful sight.

AFTER all the kissing and the hugging and the sobbing is over, somebody makes the mistake of asking Jolly John how he came to leave us and cross the road.

"Well," he draws, "I'll tell you: I've always been very, very fond of children, and loving them the way I do has given me a very keen insight into their little minds. Out there in those pines I said to myself: 'Jolly John, if you were a child would you play in these nice, clean, safe piney woods when you could go just across the road and root around in a nice, snaky, mucky black swamp?'"

"It was that simple. They'd just strayed off the path in the swamp looking for some nice quicksand to play in. It really wasn't any trouble finding 'em at all. Of course now, if I hadn't loved children and known their little—"

I don't have to listen any longer. I can tell by the worshipful looks on the faces of my wife and my sister that I've got myself a brother-in-law.



Jean's eyes get real shiny; Uncle Baggy's get real glassy.

Sir Dinadan and the



SO this earl made his complaint that there was a giant hight Taulurd by him that destroyed all his lands, and how he durst nowhere ride nor go for him. "Sir," said the knight, "whether useth he to fight, on horseback or on foot?" "Nay," said the earl, "there be no horse able to carry him." "Then will I fight him on foot," said the knight.

—Sir Thomas Malory.



AFTER supper, the hostess demanded of Sir Dinadan a song of love, and all the other ladies supported her; and so Sir Dinadan being the only gentleman present, the demand was unanimous.

"Fie upon Your Grace!" he cried, knitting his brows and flashing his eyes in mock distress. "A song of love, quoth-a! Nay, God forgive you—and defend me! For well you know my opinions on that subject. Ask me for a song of hate—of murder or battle—or of the hunting of wolves, wild pigs, dragons or giants—of anything betwixt heaven and hell, except love!"

The hostess, who was an elderly dowager duchess, laughed unrestrainedly, as did the other ladies, with the sole exception of the only young one present.

"Hah, madam, you are cruel!" Dinadan railed on. "You bid me to sup, and now you command me to sing of love—to sing for my supper, like poor little Dan Tucker. And of love, of all things! Nay, Duchess, your hospitality deserves a better return than any song I could make on that obnoxious subject."

At this, even the youngest guest laughed, though uncertainly; and the hostess, with tears of mirth hopping on her fat cheeks, cried: "Sing what you will, naughty boy—only sing!"

The knight's air, attitude and facial expression changed as quick as winking, and all for the better, and he said, "Gramercy, ma'am" to the Duchess as if he really meant it. He shifted his chair a little away from the table and brought his lute, which was slung behind him by a broad ribbon about his neck, around to his front; and he said mildly: "Nay, Duchess, of what you will!" And, with a poetical, far-away and yet introspective look in his eyes, he touched his fingers to the strings. And so he played, now slow, now fast, now high, now low—but soon a melody took shape.

"Of love," he said, and twitched and peaked a cynical eyebrow.

Then he sang. He sang of love and lovers, in general and in particular. He sang of famous love-affairs of the

past, naming the great lovers by name. It was beautiful and heart-melting; and faded lips trembled, and faded eyes shone and misted, and tears ran on cheeks both fat and thin. Even the bright lips and eyes of the youngest lady trembled and misted slightly. Then he sang of notable, and even notorious, affairs of the day, but without naming the lovers concerned therein; and this too—the words and the music alike—enchanted ears and hearts. The applause was generous. When it subsided, Dinadan stood up and bowed to right and left.

"I am honored by your approval of my pretty song," he said. "I could sing more, but to a less honeyed tune—of the bitter and salty fruits of love—lovers mad and naked in the wilderness, thirsty in the desert, crippled in hidden places, and dead and bloody on the ground; maddened, exiled, crippled and slain in the name of love, to feed the vanity of women. But you would not like it."

Now his face was grim. He turned to the hostess, at whose right hand he had sat, and said: "I thank you for the noble cheer and graciousness, ma'am. And now I must beg to be excused, for I must be up and about full early tomorrow."

He did not explain that if he failed to raise the wind, to the tune of five

Giant Taulurd

In days of old, when knights were bold, one sometimes took a fall—and even then ladies were unpredictable.

by THEODORE GOODRIDGE ROBERTS



hundred silver crowns, by noon of the next day, his best suit of armor, and his spare horse, and the best of his wardrobe even to the gorgeous garments in which he stood, would be seized by a certain flinty infidel who held a chattel-mortgage on the lot: but the good Duchess more than suspected the truth, for young Sir Dinadan's haphazard economy was a subject of comment in the best and even the not-so-good circles of society. Now the dowager hostess extended a plump hand, which the cavalier took lightly in his lean and hard sword-and-lute hand, and bowing low, saluted with his lips. He straightened his back then, but instead of retiring, he stood and widened his eyes at something in the palm of his hand.

"Nay, madam, you know better," he murmured, with a sigh that was almost a moan.

"A trifle!" she protested. "A mere nothing between good friends."

He said, with a sad smile: "Aye, a mere nothing worth a king's ransom. Nay, dear lady, it cannot be. Had I saved your life or honor with spear and sword, shed and lost blood for you, it would be another matter. For that sort of thing—knight-errantry—is my profession. But all this play of wit and this railery against love to make you laugh, and then these songs of

love and lovers to wring your heart, are as purely social and noncommercial as Your Grace's delightful suppers. For deeds of arms I take my fees—when I can get them, that's to say—like any honest laborer his wages, but I guard my amateur standing as a poet right jealously."

So saying, he gave the great diamond back to the Duchess, bowed again, and retired from the hall.

"The datted young fool!" muttered the Duchess, returning the ring to a plump finger.

The young damosel who sat at the hostess' left hand, asked gravely: "What ails the poor man?" And she added, before the other could speak again: "Not modesty, that's obvious."

The Duchess dabbed at her wet eyes with tips of bejeweled fingers and sighed. "Nothing ails the poor boy that a wise and witty wife—and rich, of course—couldn't cure."

"Then why isn't he married? He seems personable enough, despite his self-conceit and his scurvy condemnation of the fruits of love. Can't he find a personable damosel or she him—witty and wise and rich enough to marry and mend him?"

"A damosel! Pah an' bah! That's the poor foolish young man's trouble: Damosels. A murrain on them!—present company excepted, of course.

They are what ails him—the hussies! As faithless as witless, the chits have befuddled and befooled him till he—well, my dear, you have heard with your own ears what he thinks of the fruits of romantic love. They lack the brains and experience for wit and wisdom and understanding sympathy with a poet's mind and heart. So, in their feckless, shallow, selfish vanity they have made a railing cynic of him. Yet he can still—at my request—sing gloriously of love and lovers, as you but now heard him do. At my request, ah me! And if he spoke villainously of lovers mad and athirst and crippled and dead, it was not his true self speaking. Properly handled—fondly guided and guarded and appreciated by someone of equal wit and superior worldly experience—he would soon be cured of his cynicism."

"So that's it—you fat old goose!" thought the girl, veiling her eyes. And she murmured: "I see what you mean, Duchess."

Now back to Sir Dinadan: Because he was too proud, or too shy, to make the embarrassed state of his exchequer known to any of his knightly friends, and (as we have seen) too proud—or maybe too cautious—to accept gifts from ladies, the chattel-mortgage on his best suit of armor and spare charger and the pick of his wardrobe was foreclosed at high noon.

"Always at Your Worship's service," said the moneylender, rubbing his hands together at the conclusion of the business. "Always ready to accommodate you, Sir Dinadan, and at the same infinitesimal charge in the future as in the past, though I starve and my children go in rags. Good fortune to Your Worship now, and power to your elbow. Call again soon."

"God forbid!" muttered Dinadan. He dined dismally at his inn, then, with the assistance of the kindly taverner, got himself buckled and latched and laced into such articles of plate and chain body-armor as remained to him. The ensemble was complete, though some of the items were dented, and all were tarnished. Now he had only one horse, but it was the best he had ever owned and as good as any

knight's best—the great Garry. And his arms were of the best, and so were the big charger's accouterments. But he and Garry were so hung about with gear, which included two spare lances, that they cut a conspicuous figure. So he rode forth by a back way and sought the hills behind the town by mean alleys and obscure lanes. Even so, he did not win through unobserved. Dogs barked and a donkey brayed; raggedy folk of various ages disappeared before him into low doorways of hovels and peered after him from windows that were no more than holes. A lad in green finery appeared suddenly from behind a hedge, stood staring for a moment, then turned and darted back out of sight.

"Hah, a page!" said Dinadan. "Silks and velvet, and a gemmy gold brooch in his cap! What devilment is he up to here?"

He soon won clear of the last poor hovel and was within the toss of a pint pot of the shade of a hanging wood.

"A little faster now, good Garry," he urged; and the burdened charger lurched into a trot that set all their gear to jouncing and clanging.

THEY were within a spear's-length of the wood when the dappled shade directly in front stirred softly and emitted a lady all in white and silver atop a white jennet; and that was not all, for a lad in green finery and with a gemmy brooch in his cap was at the lady's stirrup. Dinadan pulled Garry to a jolty stop.

"The same page!" he muttered. "Premeditated! What's the meaning of it? Who's spying on me?"

A suspicion of the hospitable dowager duchess flickered in his mind but was instantly dismissed, for the lady on the jennet bore no slightest resemblance in either shape or carriage to that generous and sprightly grand-mamma. Now she rode forward and stopped close and brushed aside the little veil which fluttered from the front of her high, pointed cap. And she smiled and frowned with the one look—a thing he had never seen done before.

"At your service, damosel," he said, but uncertainly, and glanced aside.

"Gramercy, sir! But do you mean it?"

"If you are threatened in person, honor or estate—in dire peril of any kind—my sword and spear are at your service."

"You would say the same to any damosel."

"Damosel or dame—or wench or poor woman in need of protection—or any overmatched knight, or churl too, for that matter—according to the vows of knighthood."

"But you don't know me."



"Good! I'll be ready to fight in a minute. Does he want it with sharp spears or blunted? I have one of each."

"Nay, you sat at our hostess' left last night at supper."

"Ah!" she sighed; and now she smiled without frowning.

She veiled her eyes with fluttering lashes and murmured: "I am but an ignorant country girl, and the ways of royal courts, and of mighty champions as well as of great poets, are all new to me, but I must venture now to beg a perilous service of you."

"Name it," he cried impulsively.

She said: "I would not do so if you had not spoken last night of hunting giants and dragons."

He interrupted: "Nay, I spoke only of singing of hunting them. In truth, I've never so much as set eyes on either a dragon or a giant. Nay, I do not claim to rival St. George or Jack the giant-killer: but I will undertake anything once, and mayhap twice at a pinch, within the rules of chivalry—and the pinch is upon me now."

The damosel gazed upward from her low jennet at the knight on his tall horse, inclining toward him and making play with her eyes; and he met that play as well as he could, but with more of a goggle than a gaze.

"It's a giant," she whispered.
He continued to goggle in silence, stricken with the realization that her eyes were the most disrupting and altogether wonderful of his experience, and that—God defend him!—the rest

She made as if to turn her jennet aside, but was stayed by his cry of protest.

"Not so fast! Where is he? I'll have a good go at him, mauger my head!"

The page skipped back into the wood, to reappear in a minute mounted on a country cob and followed by a stout woman on another cob, and a groom leading a large horse loaded with bags and bundles and hampers. Then the page went ahead, with the groom and packhorse next, and then the woman. The damosel and the knight brought up the rear. Thus they skirted the edge of the hanging forest for a short distance, and then turned up into it.

"You were all ready for the journey, Damosel," remarked Dinadan.

"Please call me Agnes," she said, with a shoot of an eye. "My mother eloped with my father on St. Agnes' Eve, and so I was named for that saint."

"Agnes," he murmured. "A lovely name. And you call me Dinadan."



of her was a match for them. Now those eyes filled with tears, and she bowed her head.

"But never mind," she sighed.

He made a sudden partial recovery of his wits and cried: "What's that?"

"I said it's a giant," she murmured.

"Hah, a giant!"

"Eight feet high—and wide and thick. But never mind him. He devastates my father's lands—oh, the cruel monster! But it is too much to ask of any young knight. Forget it—and my thoughtlessness—and go your way in peace."

At that, she put a hand to her eyes and wept.

"What now?" he asked, his voice thick and soft.

"Nay—I'm afraid—for you," she sobbed.

Then Sir Dinadan swore by his halidom that he would chop that giant down even if he stood as high and thick as a watch-tower.

At that, the damosel's tears ceased as suddenly as an April shower, and she cried "Gramercy!" brightly, and turned her head and spoke to the page in green.

"Nay, not that mouthful!" she protested. "I'll call you Din—or, better still, Dinny."

He shuddered; for the very first girl who had made a monkey of him had called him that. Dinny! He shuddered again, and was about to suggest "Danny," when he realized that it too had humiliating and therefore unhappy associations. So he smiled as well as he could and said nothing. But he thought: "I must be careful now. No one of them is to be trusted with a man's heart—not even the most beautiful in Christendom, as Agnes



"Nobody but a fool would meet the giant Taulurd in single combat. He must be slightly mad too."

surely is. Ah, Agnes—as good as beautiful, I'll swear! But I must be thrice careful now, for to take a wound from her would be mortal." But his only utterance was a profound sigh; and at that she shot him with both eyes.

"What ails you, Dinny Boy?" she asked softly.

THAT was better, for it was what his kind parents had called him in the carefree days of childhood; so he answered cheerfully: "Nothing." And she, thinking of the old Duchess' words to the effect that nothing ailed him that a wise and witty wife could not cure, smiled innocently with her lips and enigmatically with her eyes, but tenderly withal. They spoke little after that in the next hour, but all the while kept as closely side-by-side as the trees and bushes and the haz-

zards underfoot permitted. So, perforce, they went slowly and joltily.

At last Dinadan exclaimed: "You would have come away without me!" (A sharper stumble on Garry's part than usual had jolted the thought into words.)

"Why do you say that?" she asked, with a quick look.

"You were all ready for the road," he said.

She laughed: "D'y'e call this a road, Dinny Boy?"

"Nay, nor even a track for wild swine," he answered. "And since you mention it, I'll make so bold as to say that I doubt that gay springal's ability to lead the way. But road or track, you were all ready to take it without me."

She glanced aside and said: "Don't worry, Dinny Boy. Victor is very

clever in the woods, and out of them too; and he has a map of the way home, which we made together last night."

"Victor? Do you mean that jackanapes in green?"

She averted her face and smiled; and eyes and lips were in agreement this time; neither was enigmatic or innocent, but both were complacent. But that smile meant nothing to Dinadan, for he couldn't see it; and when she looked at him again, it was with an expression of childish hurt. Her lower lip trembled, and her eyes were dim.

"Why do you miscall him so? He is an honorable page—and will be a squire when he's old enough—and maybe as good a knight as you, some day."

"That's not much to ask of him," sneered Dinadan.



"I don't ask more of him—of my dear little brother," she sighed. "Unless it be a kinder heart than yours," she added, even more faintly.

Dinadan's lips uncurred, and he actually gaped; and he blushed from scalp to chin and ear to ear, angered and confused for his unwarranted jealousy, and even more so for his uncouth display of it: for was he not a man of the world and a cynic to boot? So he hung his head and muttered: "Nay, I'm the fool of the world!" And now the damsel smiled complacently again, and this time without averting her face.

Before sunset they halted beside a brook and there Dinadan, Victor, the groom and the woman made camp while Agnes, seated on a moss-cushioned stump, looked on. They unloaded, unsaddled, unbited and baited the horses; and then young Victor helped the knight get out of his armor, and the woman and the groom pitched a little tent of silk. Dinadan noticed that the servants had to shift the tent here and there several times before it was to the damsel's liking.

"Agnes is hard to suit," said Victor. "Hah," said Dinadan noncommittally.

"And she has her own way in everything."

"D'ye tell me so?"

"And she always thinks she knows best. Take yourself, for instance, sir."

"Myself? For instance of what?"

"Of her conceit of her own opinion, and her self-will. This giant business could have been handled without her butting into it. There was no need of coming to Camelot to find a knight to give battle to that giant. I could name at least three nearer home by twenty leagues who would be fools enough—no offence intended, sir!—to take him on if she asked them to. But not Sis! Not for Agnes! She must travel thirty leagues and more, and then back again, to fetch a champion."

"Just so. But not so fast, if you please. You spoke but now of fools who would do battle with that giant. What d'ye mean by that?"

"Just that, sir. Nobody but a fool would meet him in single combat. He can cut clean through a ten-ton haystack with one stroke."

"A stark stroke indeed," said the knight thoughtfully. "But why single combat? Since he is a cruel monster who devastates your father's lands, why has he not been attacked in force and destroyed like any other mad beast?"

"Nay, sir, this grisly Taulurd is no fool. Not fool enough to stand against odds or be ambushed by archers, at least. He retreats to the highest mountains, where only goats could find him, at the first sign of a gathering against him, and then comes down at night—but never twice in the same place in the one month—and knocks over a few farmsteads and carries off cheeses and hams and new-baked loaves and kegs of mead and ale. But he must be slightly mad too, for he leaves letters behind him in which he challenges the knightage of Christendom to meet him in fair single combat under the rules of chivalry and fight him to the death. But the challenge is for gentlemen only, for he claims to be one himself."

"What, a giant a gentleman? I never heard of such a thing!"

"Well, sir, if his claim be true, you shall not be dishonored by being cut in two by a churl."

"Gramercy!" said Dinadan dryly.

Then the damsel called them to supper. All supped well, though Sir Dinadan could not put the giant Taulurd from his thoughts until after his third horn of ale. Then he felt so much easier in his mind—to say nothing of his stomach—that at the damsel's request he played and sang three old songs and a new one; and the last was the best of the four, and of love.

THE Damosel Agnes and her nurse occupied the tent, and Dinadan, Victor and the groom slept in their cloaks, on moss and fern. They were early astir next morning, and Victor

helped the knight into his hardware even as he had helped him out of it the night before, without being asked to. And while he latched and tied and buckled, he talked; and most of his talk consisted of questions, for he possessed an active and curious mind, and was just fourteen years of age.

"D'ye know Sir Launcelot du Lake, sir?"

"I have that honor."

"Did you ever fight him?"

"Nay, God forbid!"

"Why, could he beat you?"

"Aye, horsed or afoot—me or any other knight in the world."

"How big is he, then?"

"How big? Why, no bigger than myself."

"Did he ever kill a giant?"

"There's a song that says he killed the giant Brian Kelly in Ireland years ago, in an all-day combat, and all but died himself of the wounds he took in it."

"How big was that giant?"

"The song calls him as big as Goliath of Gath."

"AND 'twas almost more than the world's champion could do to master him in a day-long fight! And yet you—not one of the world's best, by your own saying—would give battle single-handed to giant Taulurd. You're mad, sir!"

"Ah—not at all."

"Sir, harky to me! I say this because I like you. If you are not mad, or at least bewitched, you're a fool! I say this for your own good, sir. Agnes went to Camelot to find a champion able enough to rid us of Taulurd in single combat, regardless of expense up to a half of all our father's earthly possessions, which are considerable. And what happened? Did she get Sir Launcelot? No, nor even asked him. Or Sir Lamorak, Sir Ector de Maris, Sir Bors, Sir Percival, Sir Tristram of Liones or Sir Palamides the Saracen? No, nor addressed herself to any one of those champions, but came away with you, willy-nilly. You both must be mad! But it's you who'll die of it, sir."

"But why?" Dinadan murmured uncertainly.

"Because Taulurd's too big for you."

"Nay, why did she pick on me?"

"For no reason. For a whim. She's full of whims, and has always been allowed to indulge them. If I were you, I'd turn aside and go my way right now, while she's still in the tent. I say this for your own sake, sir, because I like you."

"Gramercy. But she has my knightly word for it. I swore by my halidom to have ado with that giant."

"God defend you! But never say I didn't warn you."

"Isn't he wonderful?" cried the damosel. "He's the best poet and lutanist in Christendom."



At that moment, the damosel emerged from the tent. She was all in green and silver this morning, and her cheeks were roses, her brows a lily and her eyes beyond any poet's power of description; and she smiled and waved a hand.

"I'm not dead yet!" muttered Dinadan; and he smiled and waved in return.

But the lad Victor swore hotly, though not loudly.

So, after breakfast, they rode again, with Victor leading, and Agnes and the knight bringing up the rear, all as before. The way was still rough and tangled; and Dinadan felt an uneasy suspicion that Victor might be up to some trickery. But not for long. He encountered Agnes's upward gaze a few times, holding it longer each successive time, and soon forgot all else. So they stumbled through thick and thin till close upon noon. Then Victor called a halt and came bursting back to Dinadan.

"There's a big knight on a big horse hovering in a glade just ahead!" he cried.

"Hah!" exclaimed Dinadan, straightening in his saddle. "Does he want to fight?"

"What else would he want, sir?—pacing up and down, spear in hand."

"Good! I'll be ready in a minute. Does he want it with sharp spears or blunted? I have one of each."

Then the damosel laughed like tinkling bells.

"Oh, no, Dinny Boy," she said. "You are on your way to slay a giant for me."

"One thing at a time," he said, beginning to clear for action by casting off the bulkiest item—a great sack of oats—of the goods and gear which cumbered his saddle before and behind and on both sides.

Victor told him that the hovering knight carried a blunted spear and a covered shield, and straightway fell to helping him clear for action. The damosel crowded in on her jennet.

"Dinny Boy, this stranger is no concern of yours now, for you have given me your knightly oath to rid me of that giant!" she protested, shooting both eyes.

"True, dear Agnes," he replied. "But by my vows of knighthood, I am pledged to meet every challenger to chivalrous combat."

So he rode forth into the forest glade, and the boy rode at his left stirrup; and the groom with the great packhorse, and the nurse on her cob, and the damosel on her palfrey still protesting and upon the brink of tears, all followed.

At sight of them, the strange knight bawled: "You can't pass here! I keep this way against all comers."

"That's to be demonstrated," replied Dinadan, and he laid his blunted spear and dressed his shield before him.

"Defend yourself!" roared the other, and came at him at full speed.

"Don't hurt him!" screamed Agnes.

Now the great Garry was under way and running hard and straight; and now a clanging thud shook the air, and the damosel covered her eyes with a trembling hand.

"Ho-ho!" exulted the groom.

The damosel ventured to peep between her fingers, then cried "Glory be to God!" For the knight flat on the greensward was not Dinadan, nor was the charger seated on its tail like a dog her champion's.

DINADAN helped the unhorsed knight to his feet, and Victor did the same for the unhorsed horse.

"'Tis ever thus," said the knight. "This is my fiftieth tumble on this same ground. I always depart the saddle at the moment of contact, though with the firmest intention—but no longer a faintest hope—of remaining fixed. The fact is, the knack of keeping my seat is a phase of the art of chivalrous combat that I have never mastered."

"I wonder, sir, that you persist in this adventure," said Dinadan politely.

"Nay, to challenge and dispute the passage of this glade is a family tradition, and I swore to my father on his deathbed to maintain it."

"Then I wonder, sir, that you don't dispute it aloft, and with swords instead of spears."

"That may not be, alas! Because my sire, and his, and his too, were all superior jousters, but not so good on their feet, the sacred tradition demands horses and lances. But never mind that now: it is time for relaxation and refreshment."

So this good though frustrated traditionalist, hight Sir Joram, entertained the travelers with the best of victuals and drink in a fair pavilion, and then bought his forfeited horse and arms back from Sir Dinadan at a generous price of his own naming. So the travelers departed and went their way in the same order as they had come, save for young Victor's frequent halts and backward casts to goggle and smile admiringly at Sir Dinadan. And Agnes too regarded the knight with a new look as well as the old ones.

"You are wonderful, Dinny Boy," she told him.

"How so?" he asked, modestly.

"A wonderful poet, of course—I knew that. But the way you knocked that big Sir Joram off his horse was simply too wonderful!"

"Were you surprised?"

"Yes, I was. I was shaking with fear for you, and hid my eyes; and then I looked and saw him flat on his back. Oh, yes, I was almost as surprised as thankful to see that great big Sir Joram on the ground and you still jinking in the saddle, Dinny Boy."

"Nay, not so big," he protested; and he would have continued and asked why she looked to him to rid her of a giant if she had doubted his ability to deal with a chance-come knight-errant, had not the question faded from his mind before the impact of her glances.

So they traveled till sunset without further adventure; and throughout the next day too; and so on, day after day, till a few hours past nightfall of the seventh day, when they arrived at the edge of a black moat.

"Here we are, and didn't lose so much as a horseshoe!" young Victor exclaimed proudly.

"True for you, dear lad!" cried Dinadan. "Not even a horseshoe! Congratulations!"

And yet he knew, exultantly though confusedly, that his heart was lost—again—this time beyond recovery.

"You don't know Sir Dinadan. If you had seen him lay that great big Sir Joram on his back, you'd know."

Victor blew three blasts on his horn, then two blasts, then three again; and then the red of torches flared high and low from a vast bulk of blackness beyond the black moat, and answering horns brayed, and the clanks of a great winch and the creaks of great hinges sounded, and at last the great drawbridge came down with a thump.

THE father of Agnes and Victor was the Earl Fergus, and their mother was the Lady Fay; and when Sir Dinadan was presented to them, it was plain to see that they had never heard of him and were puzzled and disappointed at their daughter's choice of a giant-killer. But they were too kind and polite to show their feelings by worse than blinks and arched brows; and they plied him with courteous attentions and the best of meats and drinks at supper. After the removal of platters and trenchers, the lady said kindly: "Sir, observing a fine lute at your back, I venture to hope that you will oblige us with a little music."

"Your servant to command, madam," answered Dinadan, who had



quenched his thirst with a horn of mead and several cups of Spanish wine; and he drew the instrument around to his front and set his fingers to the strings. Then he flashed his eyes at Agnes and sang and played better than ever before.

"Isn't he wonderful?" cried the damosel. "He's the best poet and lutanist in Christendom."

The Lady Fay bowed her head, for she was too deeply moved for words. The Earl was vastly impressed too, but he drained a cup and found his tongue. He addressed his daughter.

"I believe you, dear child. Yes, indeed; but I thought it was understood that our need was for a knight-at-arms—the best, or at least the second best—but surely not for a poet, my dear, no matter how good, as such."

Agnes replied: "But you don't know Sir Dinadan, papa! If you had seen him lay that great big Sir Joram flat on his back, you would not speak so."

"That's right, Papa!" the lad Victor exclaimed. "I saw it. I was right there. And why wouldn't I be? For I'm his squire."

"That was nothing, sir and madam," Dinadan protested modestly. "Good Sir Joram is the unhandiest knight, and the most tottery in his saddle, I ever laid lance against. But don't think too badly of me, I pray you, for I have toppled many a better joustier than him, with sharp spears as well as blunted, and held my own on foot too, sword to sword, upon occasion. There was big and vile Baron Uffing for one, who had ten ladies starving in a tower."

"Uffel?" queried the Earl. "We are out of the world in this place and don't hear everything. What of him, young sir?"

"It was two years ago, sir. After unhorsing him, I got down and fought him afoot. He was bigger on his feet than horsed, but I was faster. So, we slashed and hacked half a day, and he split my shield in two. But he himself was in two pieces when I was done with him; and so I let the poor ladies out of the tower."

AGNES and her mother were shaken beyond the power of utterance, and young Victor was speechless with admiration, but not so the Earl.

"How big was this Uffel?" he asked.

"Why, sir, he was bigger than Sir Lamorak—but not as good, or I'd not be here now."

"Well and honestly said, my friend, and I'll speak you as honestly. This giant is bigger than a windmill, and can cut through a haystack with one stroke of his sword."

"So I have heard, sir. But size isn't everything. Tell me, does he fight best on horseback or on foot?"



"I'm not a haystack," jeered Dinadan, as the giant stumbled.

"Not on horseback, that's certain, for there's no horse big enough to carry him."

"Then will I fight him on foot," said Sir Dinadan.

At that, the lord and lady and Victor all cried out in horrified protest, but the damosel veiled her eyes and was silent.

"To go against him on a big horse and run him through with a war-spear—that would be your only chance!" cried the Earl.

"Nay, sir, no true knight keeps his saddle against an opponent on foot. 'Twould be a dastardly act, sir—a breach of the laws of chivalry."

"Are you a fool—mad, that's to say—or bewitched?"

"Maybe all three, sir; but I have sworn by my halidom to essay this giant, so that I'll do; and since he must fight on foot, so must I."

The Earl swore in his beard. Then he and the Countess and the lad all looked searchingly at the damosel, who continued to sit with veiled eyes

and an enigmatic smile. Then the three exchanged questioning glances, with much arching of eyebrows: but Dinadan, gazing languishingly at Agnes, missed all the byplay.

Earl Fergus sighed as if with relief, then addressed the young knight again, but in a changed voice and manner.

"You're probably right, dear Sir Dinadan. Drink up and fill again."

OUR hero was for setting out to seek the giant first thing in the morning, but his host explained to him that a rendezvous must be decided upon, and Taulurd notified of it, and the exact hour—all of which could not be done in a day, or maybe two or even three, as no raid had been reported of late, and the monster might be high in the mountains. So Dinadan penned a proper challenge, at the Earl's directing, as follows:

"I, Sir Dinadan, a knight of that mighty prince Arthur Pendragon his



dubbing, do challenge ye giant Taulurd to single and mortal combat according to the sacred rules of High Chivalry in Dragon Valley under St. Elmo mount at high noon of the feast day of St. Michael—to which I swear by my Halidom and do herewith set my unicorn seal and my name
Dinadan."

This document was given to a trusty fellow, who returned at nightfall with word that he had passed it on, according to the Earl's instructions, to a certain trusty mountaineer who knew the giant's whereabouts.

Now Dinadan was faced by four days of inaction, a fact which he regretted in a sense; for despite his brave talk, he was beginning to wonder if he had not overstrained the obligations of knighthood in the matter of undertaking to dismount for the encounter. In another sense, he was glad of the delay, for it gave him four more sure days of life—of life with Agnes, the most enchanting of all the

damosels of his hectic and disastrous experiences. He loved her. And she loved him, and told him so on the second day. He made a beautiful song of it, for which she kissed him tenderly; but soon after that, instead of making another song or singing the same one again, he became silent and sad, and sat with drooping head.

"What ails my Dinny Boy?" she murmured at his ear.

His only answer was a sigh.

She murmured closer: "I shall love and cherish you all your life long."

"Which may not be long at all," he mumbled.

"If you mean that giant, cheer up!" she cried. "You'll take no harm from him, I know, or I'd sense it in my heart; and the Raven of Fergus—sure precursor of sorrow to this house—would be flapping at my window every night. But instead of that dismal fowl, a robin—the Cadwallader bird of hanoiness—has sung to me every midnight since our return. My mother was a Cadwallader."

So he cheered up, being a respecter of family traditions and a firm believer in all omens and supernatural warnings, good and bad.

SIR DINADAN set out at dawn of Michaelmas Day for his rendezvous with Taulurd the giant, accompanied by Victor to show him the way. He was in good spirits, though fuddled by the damosel's parting caresses; and when the sun came up, disclosing St. Michael's daisies like drifts of fairy smoke under every hanging wood, he broke into song; and mighty Garry, well rested and full of oats, pranced like a colt. Victor's hackney pranced and whickered too, but the lad himself was silent, and still in his saddle save for frequent lurtive turnings of his head to right and left and over a sho-

They came to the Dragon Valley under the chapel of St. Elmo, but the giant was not there. They waited till past high noon, and still he did not come. So they rode onward into a higher valley, and from that into a yet higher, with Victor leading the way; and still the lad spoke little and sang not at all, and continued to shoot covert glances at the thickets and dark shaws to right and left.

"D'ye look for the giant to leap out upon us from a holly bush, dear lad?" asked Dinadan brightly, toying with the thought that maybe his challenge had frightened Taulurd clear over the mountains and out of the country.

"Nay, sir, if he comes at you, 'twill be from straight in front," Victor answered gravely.

"Why so glum, then? D'ye doubt the issue? And all the omens on my side!"

"Omens? God mend your simplicity!"

At that moment the giant himself appeared before them from behind a knoll of huge boulders and crooked thorn-trees, resembling—so was Dinadan's first thought—a great rock rather than a creature of flesh and blood. He was almost square in shape, and moved like a mass of stone and wood. He was encased in hairy hides as stiff as iron plates, and carried a round shield of leather embossed with horn on his left arm. His sword, which he flourished in his right hand without apparent effort, was half as long again as Dinadan's standard two-handed weapon. Victor's horse tried to bolt, and even the courageous Garry shied at that appalling apparition.

"Charge!" screamed Victor. "Let him have it! It's now or never!"

"Tut-tut!" said the knight, dismounting. "Hold Garry. Keep him out of this. He might get hurt."

He advanced up the gentle slope with his long shield dressed before him.

"Giant Taulurd, I presume?" he called out politely.

"The same," squawked the other, in a voice more suitable for a small varlet than a bulky ravaging giant. "Are you alone?"

"Quite, save for my honorable squire here," returned the knight. "Didn't you get my letter?"

"I don't believe all I read," Taulurd squawked. "But you look honest, and I'll treasure your name as a true and honorable knight. So say your prayers, Sir Dinadan!" And with that he swung his great sword in a semicircular sweep which swished short of its objective by a half-ell if an inch.

"Gramercy," said Dinadan. "You're a poor judge of distance."

He stood his ground. Taulurd recovered his equilibrium with a stagger, advanced one ponderous pace and set himself for another swing and let it fly with a grunt. That second stroke was even more terrific than the first; but Dinadan avoided it with a skip backward.

"I'm not a haystack," jeered Dinadan; and then, while the giant stumbled to get his big feet under his point of balance again, Dinadan cast away his shield, grasped the hilt of his sword in both hands, sprang in lightly and as lightly out again.

Victor uttered a cry of astonishment, and the giant a squawk of con-

sternation—and with cause, for the shapeless rolls and folds of hides in which the massive torso had so lately been encased and draped were now fallen about his legs and feet.

"Bah!" cried Dinadan, addressing his squire, but still watching his discomfited antagonist. "I but cut a thong or two; and look at him, fat and hobbled and undone! He was too heavy for his legs, anyhow, and too slow to fight anything but a haystack. So this is your horrible giant?—and my high adventure?—the devil take him! I'll have no more to do with him. I'm a knight, not a butcher." Then he jabbed at the quaking giant. "I won't foul my sword with your blubber. I spare your gluttonous life. You will be dead of your own fat within the year, anyhow."

Taulurd, cowed and abashed and using his monstrous sword as a staff to steady him on his cluttered-up legs, sobbed and squawked his gratitude and relief in so shamelessly abject a manner that both the squire and the knight blushed for him.

"Gramercy, gramercy, noble sir! The saints will reward you, merciful knight! I'm old and harmless—and will mend my ways—turn holy hermit and deafen heaven with my praise of merciful Sir Dinadan. I'll fast on roots and wild honey—no more beef and beer—never another ravaged farm-

stead—by the knuckle-bones of blessed St. Elmo!"

"Have done!" cried Dinadan, in disgust; and he would have turned away then, but stood nerveless and still as stone instead: for a long arrow quivered in Taulurd's fat throat, sunk halfway to its feathers. And even while he stared, horrified yet incredulous, another arrow struck and sank there, and four or five more pierced the unprotected gross breast and belly; and the giant, spouting blood, opened his dimming eyes wide upon Dinadan, and cried "*Treachery!*" and crashed to earth and lay still.

THEN Dinadan moved, but woodenly. He looked to his right, and over his right shoulder, then to his left; but the rugged coverts of bushes and boulders showed nothing of life. Then he turned and looked at Victor.

"So?" he whispered hoarsely. "You fixed an ambush—and have made a false knight of me—and a liar and a dastard—and a murderer."

The lad's face was white as chalk, and he answered with a cry as harsh as the knight's whisper.

"Nay, not me! 'Twas *her* doing. She would keep you from harm—by fair means or foul!"

"Agnes?"

"Who else? She always has her way!"

"But the omens?"

"There were no omens, good or bad. But she feared for your life; and so an ambush of archers was set in the Dragon Valley, and when he did not meet you there, the archers followed us here."

Dinadan moaned: "God's wounds!"

Now an old man all in wolf-skins and white whiskers came suddenly from behind a rock and knelt beside the dead giant and cried out that his kind master had been murdered.

Dinadan went to him and said: "Old man, hark to me! If you know a way out of here—over the mountains and clear out of this vile land of lies and dishonor—show it to me."

The mountaineer rose and pointed to the entrance of a narrow, climbing glen on their right.

"Lead on, then, poor fellow. Lead truly, and you have a new master: no giant now, but the fool of the world—and a forsworn dastard, to boot!"

"Me too!" blurted young Victor. "I go with you, sir—for you're the best knight I know, never mind your simplicity—through thick and thin, mauger my head!"

So they mounted and moved into and up that narrow glen, leaving the abashed and frightened archers still hiding in their coverts; but death was in Sir Dinadan's heart as surely as in the gigantic corpse on the ground behind him.



"I understood our need was for a knight-at-arms—the best, or at least the second best."

A Voyage to the Azores

With two pinases, the one called the Serpent, and the other the Mary Sparke of Plimouth, both of them belonging to Sir Walter Raleigh...

From Hakluyt's "Principall Navigations of the English Nation," all bravely drawn by that frustrated olde Pyrate:

Peter Wells

§ 2. Prizes seek
a false Securitie

The next day we discried two sailes, the one a shippe and the other a Caravel to whom we gave chase, which they seeing, with all speede made in under the Isle of Graciosa, to a certaine Fort there for their scour, where they came to an anker, and having the winde of us we could not hurt them with our ships, but we having a small boate, which we called a light horseman, wherein my selfe was, being a Musqueter, and foure more with Calivers, and foure that rowed, came neere unto the shoare against the winde, which when they saw us

come towards them they caried a great part of their marchandise on land, whither also the men of both vessels went and landed, and as soone as we came within Musquet shot, they began to shoote at us with great ordnance and small

shot, and we likewise at them, and in the ende we boarded one shippe wherein was no man left, so we cut her cables, hoysed her sailes and sent

her away with two of our men, and the other 7. of us passed more neere unto the shoare, and boarded the Caravel, which did ride within a stones cast from the shoare and so neere the land that the people did cast stones at us, but yet in despiight of them all we tooke her, and one onely Negro therein; And cutting her cables in the hawse we hoysed her sailes and being becalmed under the land, we were constrained to row her out with our boate, the Fort still shooting at us, and the people on land with Musquets and calivers, to the number of 150. or thereabout: And we answered them with the small force wee had; In the time of which our shooting, the shot of my Musquet being a crossebarre-shot happened to strike the gunner of the fort to death, even as he was giving levell to one of his great pieces, and thus we parted from them without any losse or hurt on our side.....



The Aleutian Blue Mink



THE BLACK-BORDERED CARD WAS AFFIXED TO the edge of the desk with a single thumbtack. I'd never noticed it before, because they'd never sat me down on the special chair, the one with the sawed-off legs and the backrest knocked away, the one they kept out of sight in a closet and broke out only when they had a customer who needed taking down in size. The printing on the card said:

Your story has touched our hearts.

Never before have we met anyone with more trouble than you.

Please accept our assurance of sincerest sympathy.

The desk was as old as the card, cigarette-scarred and shoeleather-battered well beyond recourse of any such simple remedy as a new paint job. The wall behind it offered a large-scale map of Los Angeles County, four thousand square miles of lush beaches, snowcapped mountains, orange groves, city blocks and sin. On the electric clock above the map, the minute hand jumped noiselessly from 11:03 to 11:04 just as my glance passed by. Next in line was a window, the sash raised high to admit whatever air the sultry July evening might care to supply. They hadn't bothered with bars or a screen on the frame—it was a forty-foot jump to the greasy concrete apron of the prowl-car parking lot.

One of them straddled a chair by the window, scowling expectantly at me over his arms, folded across the back. He was a short, stocky, middle-aged Irishman with a hard weathered complexion on a face grimly expressionless, deeply carved by the skepticism of long and disillusioning experience. A pair of clear blue eyes found shelter in that face behind a set of shaggy, almost egg-white brows. They were eyes that had seen everything, the eyes of a cop who was often called upon to lever the boom or other cops. Detective Lieutenant David Hogan happened to be in charge of the Sheriff's Confidential Squad.

I looked at him, fairly steadily, and passed him another stiff dose of my No. 24B, Ingratiating Smile (police officers and traffic-court judges only).

"Sorry, Dave," I said again, a little wearily. "It's just no sale. So I was there, and you walked in on me. I saw what you saw, only I saw it maybe twenty seconds earlier, that's all. I don't even know the guy's name."

The other one gave me a dry little cough. He was resting his shoulder blades against the wall behind me

by the door, a lean, swarthy young Mexican with the build of a professional welterweight carelessly draped in slacks, brown loafer jacket and canary-yellow sport-shirt open at the neck. "Paging Shirley Temple," he intoned in a nasal singsong. Detective Sergeant Ramon Garcia, fumbling for his thumbscrew and pliers.

I ignored him and said: "Oh, come off it, Dave. You've known me long enough. I haven't cut a throat in years."

"Yeah? You was there. You just admitted it."

"Sure, but not when it happened. I came in, and there he lay on the couch; and then you came in and yanked me out so fast my head still swims; and here we are back in your office doing this ring-around-the-rosy. Three times I've told you already, but I'll sing it again. I didn't do it, and I don't know a thing that might help either you or the Homicide boys. Maybe he did it himself."

"You notice any knife or razor lying around?"

"Didn't have time to look for one." It was a little white lie, but I didn't expect to fool him, either. He dropped the scowl and continued to stare at me thoughtfully. The phone rang on the desk, and Garcia went over to answer it in half a dozen grunts and coarse affirmatives. Outside, a Diesel truck backfired staccato through the patiently sustained mutter of the after-theater traffic on the boulevard. The air in the room was very close.

"His name was Bush," said Hogan dryly. "Clifford Bush. Would that mean anything to you?"

I shook my head. Garcia slapped the phone into its prongs and filled himself a paper cup at the venerable water cooler. "He was a cop," he said over his shoulder.

The skin on both sides of my spine started prickling again. "Oh, fine!" I said. "Now you can deal me out, for sure."

"Four years," Hogan said. "It's been that long we let you get by with pitching them curves to us, Johnny. Ever since you come out of the Army, every time we figured what the hell, the guy's picked up a couple Purple Hearts; he'll catch on pretty soon and maybe lay off spittin' on the ball. You got a wife; you got friends, a nice home, and you're making a living; but the way it turns out, you still don't seem to know the rules so good. What was you doing there in that apartment where we picked you up?"

An excellent question, the kind you don't want to answer at all, not even untruthfully. "It was one of those things, Dave, it really was. I passed by the door and noticed it wasn't quite closed. I thought I heard a funny noise behind it, so I took a peek. The lights were on, if you remember, and with all that blood—"

"What sort of noise?"

"That big radio set. It had been switched on loud but not tuned in to any station. It made a crackle, and a kind of drone. I turned it off, just before you came in."

"What was you doing in the building?"

He had me there, of course. I was in a jam, all right, but then one gets used to it. It's by way of an occupational risk. The part I didn't like about this one was

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Most people are honest, hard-working, law-abiding. Some are not, and if they happen to be cops, they cause a lot of grief.

This novel has cops in it, both good and bad. It is fiction, of course, and features not a single character intended to refer to any actual person, living or dead. All of its incidents, names and locations are made up, with the sole exception of a few names of cities and streets, in accordance with established literary custom. For obvious reasons, the description of police radio procedure contains certain minor inaccuracies. The unofficial cooperation of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Office is hereby gratefully acknowledged.

Coat

A deeply interesting murder mystery is developed and solved in this complete book-length novel

by

JAMES
M. FOX

*Illustrated by
Raymond Thayer*



the cop-killing angle. Cops take a very dim view when one of their own gets pushed across the track.

"I was working," I said, and stared right back at him. The door flew open, crashed against its rubber stop and groaned from all its joints. The man who came stalking in had every inch of my own six feet in height and carried another thirty pounds or so under the belt of his faded, somewhat shabby summer tweeds. A cheap straw fedora shaded its owner's countenance, which featured a bristling black mustache, a broken nose and a close-set pair of hard, contemptuous bloodshot eyes. The eyes were inspecting me, about the way a hungry alley cat would inspect a rat in a trap. The harsh, gritty voice spoke to Hogan, inquiring if I was the guy. It did not say guy—it referred to me as of probable canine maternal ancestry.

I rose unhurriedly and looked him over, flexing the muscles in backs of my thighs against the edge of the desk. It seemed like the wrong kind of night for an argument, but you can't always pick and choose. Garcia chuckled and drew himself another cup of water at the cooler; Hogan watched us imperturbably and said: "Meet Sergeant Matson, Bush's partner. Dan, meet John Marshall, the private detective. He's got a license from the State of California, and everything. Only maybe he ain't gonna keep it for long."

The bloodshot eyes narrowed to slits and focused on my jaw. A large hairy fist, complete with a square inch of seal ring, came up and cocked itself behind its shoulder, aiming slowly and in calculated exaggeration. Its mate lashed out from below and caught me in the stomach, just as I sidestepped the desk. The blow was almost sharp enough to black me out—I barely managed to stagger out from under the whistling uppercut that followed it. He kicked my chair out of his way and rushed me like an angry bull in a ponderous flurry of pistoning arms and knees. I grabbed one wrist, pushed a shoulder under his armpit and dumped him on the floor. The fall must have hurt him, but he was up in a flash, and waving a blackjack at me. I backed away from that; by then Garcia got around to cutting in on our waltz, hanging on to his collar, and Hogan cracked his eardrums with the whiplash of authority. "Dan!"

The blackjack disappeared. "Okay, Lieutenant. I'm okay now."

"You going nuts or something? You want up before the Board?"

I sat down on the desk, massaging my midriff and sucking the hot stale air back into my lungs. Garcia let go, and Matson slumped against the wall, breathing heavily, clawing at me with his eyes. "Sorry, Lieutenant," he mumbled hoarsely.

"So okay, you're sorry. Fifteen years a cop, you gotta start a brawl with a suspect in custody. Whatsamatter, you looking for a traffic beat on Signal Hill?"

With this brisk little commercial we had us a pause for station identification; but in a moment I'd have to come through with a lot of lines I didn't want to speak.

There has been a lot of plain and fancy bunk dished up about private investigators, in books and in movies and on the radio. They'd have you believe that murder is just our dish of tea, and if people would only stop doing each other in, we'd be out of a job, but fast. The real situation is, of course, that murder is one crime we never touch; and if it touches us, you can be sure we'll make a beeline for the phone and start dialing O for Operator like mad. Catching a killer is purely a matter of law-enforcement, the same thing as catching a drunken speeder. The work of a private dick consists of finding facts, locating missing people or stolen goods, protecting valuable property. All this would amount to nothing much but a lot of hard, unglamorous work, except for the one angle that will sometimes put him on the spot. His clients do insist on privacy, as it says on his business card.

Lieutenant Hogan favored me with another display of the Great Stone Face.

"So you was working, Johnny," he reminded me. "What was you working on?"

I sighed and replenished my lungs and used a handkerchief to swab the sticky brow.

"Believe it or not, Dave," I said. "In this heat, I happened to be looking for a piece of fur."

Chapter Two



IT WAS THE MUTUAL INDEMNITY ASSURANCE Society of Boston, Massachusetts, which supplied me at the time with my only substantial yearly retainer. Strictly speaking, it wasn't their case, but I had dropped by their office in downtown Los Angeles that

Thursday morning with a couple of routine reports for the bonding department when Frank Brownell, the district manager, happened to catch me through the glass partition of his cubicle and crooked an executive finger at me. He was a neat, irascible little man who affected dove-gray spats, a bamboo cane and the manner of a retired city editor from the Richard Harding Davis period: forever expecting the spectacular, forever suspecting the diabolical.

"Just called you at home," he informed me. "Your wife said you were on your way over here. You nail down that Olson party yet?"

"I've snooped around. He seems to be middling square."

"You trying to insult my intelligence, Marshall? D'you realize they want us to underwrite the fellow for fifty thousand skins?"

"That's your business, Mr. Brownell," I reminded him patiently. "So far as I'm able to tell, this Olson's a pretty fair risk. He owes his home; he's got a wife and three grown children, doesn't drink or gamble or smoke opium or anything. He kept himself a sweetie down in Inglewood for a couple of years, but she up and married a drummer from Minneapolis, last October, and Olson's walked the straight and narrow ever since. He's an Elk and a Shriner; he sings in church, pays his bills on time and is kind to insurance men and dumb animals. I'd be inclined to take a chance on him."

"Sure you would." He snorted at me for my pains. "Just so next year you'll get a trip from us to Mexico or Guatemala on expense account, to bring back Olson and what's left of the loot after some other Hollywood gal

had a go at it." He shrugged it off and leaned back in his swivel chair, fixing me with a suddenly almost benevolent eye. "Come across a little job this morning I could throw your way," he mentioned casually.

When he put it like that, I had a bit of trouble with my grin, because once before he'd steered me into a deal where one of his friends had a tiny week-end ranch in the mountains near San José, and was complaining about chicken thieves, who proved to be a pair of skuks.

"I've braced myself," I said. "The hatches are battened, the guns rolled out. What is this little job, Mr. Brownell?"

"A simple repossession case," he promised me. "Client of ours phoned this morning, asked how she should go about making a claim. She's got a floater policy with us to cover loss or damage on her jewelry and furs. I told her she had no claim, not the way this thing adds up. She's had this coat about a week—it was given to her by the boy friend, and they had a spat last night, so he just picked it up and took it back. She'd look silly, of course, if she tried to prosecute, and I explained to her we don't insure that sort of gift."

"Sounds like fun. But is the coat worth bothering about?"

"Some kind of fancy mink. She submitted a valuation of twenty thousand, but our appraiser scaled that down to fourteen-five, when he saw it last week. If you ask me, it's still too high."

I whistled and dug out my notebook and jotted down the address. "Is she expecting me?"

"She wants it back. I told her I'd send someone over. She understands we're not responsible. Better watch your step, young man; this is one of those Beverly Hills society dolls."

I said that sounded like more fun, and we shook hands on it and smiled into each other's trustful eyes like a couple of carnival barkers having a meeting of minds. Then I got out of there, into hot, dusty Broadway with traffic stacked solid both ways, and the smog blacking out the proud white Civic Center towers at two hundred yards. Out of the parking lot, out through the tunnel under Angel's Flight, out on Third Street, riding with the lights between the miles of junk-yards and factory sheds and block after block of tired old redwood shacks for tired old people, sitting out their dying days under the smoke-filtered California sun.

If you live in Beverly Hills, you don't even know about such things. Beverly Hills is movie-star town, millionaire town: it is a lushly exclusive little shopping district from which the cool, palm-lined avenues radiate up into sylvan cañons.

SIXTEEN Sycamore Terrace turned out to be a formal English bungalow screened by a row of molded deciduous. The house itself looked new, a postwar construction job on somebody's landscaped backwater lot that had been held off the market for several years as a hedge against inflation. It was the elegant type of medium-sized home referred to as a residence, the type that can usually be rented furnished with gardener and utilities paid for a thousand a month in these parts.

I left the Packard in the street to nuzzle a huge live-oak that seemed to mark the neighbors' property line, and marched up the crushed oyster shell of the driveway, feeling just as chipper as a kid with a new bike. The front porch offered climbing roses, and a big antique carriage lantern for a visitors' light, and a pearly push button that played the Westminster chimes for me. This performance brought up a colored female in a white uniform who inspected me noncommittally through the wicker grille. She studied my card doubtfully.

"Calling on Miss De Jong," I said. "From the insurance company."

That seemed to be the password. She nodded and let me in, and abandoned me to a vast and coldly fastidious living-room in wrought iron and polished glass and bright yellow suède, a room designed to put you in your place and keep you there, if you were sensitive about such things.

The blonde who made an entrance on me through the French doors from the patio did not, at first glance, seem to match the room. She was in plain white sharkskin shorts and halter, favoring me with a pair of long, graceful legs and a lot of good clean sun-kissed skin on a high-breasted, admirably proportioned body. The badminton racket she carried had suffered quite a bit of wear and tear. The lace had not, or at least not too much. She was no raving beauty, but she could handle the competition any time. The eyes were wisteria-blue, but they lacked youth and innocence: they were eyes that knew about hormone cremes and tonic massages and atropine drops and men. The look I got from them was one of dubious, slightly puzzled assessment: she didn't know about detectives yet. Her age seemed to be around twenty-six, going on thirty-eight.

She had my card and was snapping a corner of it on one almond-shaped, cherry-red thumbnail, absent-mindedly.

"I'm not entirely sure I understand. You haven't come to sell me anything, I hope?" Her voice was pretty nice, a cultured, articulate mezzo you could get to like very easily.

"Not insurance," I said, and held out my wallet to her, folded back.

She studied the photo of my license under celluloid with something of a frown.

"Oh, yes, of course." We were still standing there, in the middle of the yellow tapestry, facing each other across the coffee table's empty plate glass kidney top. "Do you really think you might—well, persuade him to come back to me?"

I blinked and inquired: "You're Miss Leila De Jong?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Frank Brownell, at Mutual Indemnity, mentioned something to me about a coat."

"Oh, that!" She frowned again; it was not quite the same thing as a shrug of unconcern. "Won't you be seated, please? I'm afraid Mr. Brownell may have misunderstood."

THE fireside couch was fairly comfortable after all. "Let's try all over from the start," I said. "I'll do my best to get it straight this time."

She laid the racket on the couch between us, like a sword. The wisteria eyes kept glancing at me, vaguely troubled. "It's all rather confusing," she told me. "You see, the marriage was to be this Saturday—in Ensenada, where he was divorced last week. Then yesterday he made this frightful scene."

"Who's he?"

"Keith McElroy. My fiancé. Do you know him?"

I shook my head. She dropped my card and adjusted the golden wave of her hair behind one shapely ear. The movement brought me a flash from the square-cut solitaire on her slender, capable hand.

"It wasn't my fault," she assured me earnestly. "Or perhaps it was. He's an awfully strange man, and I'm terribly fond of him, but I suppose I must have said something that hurt his feelings. I want you to find out if he's gone back to Vivian."

"Is she his wife?"

"His former wife. She's very sweet, but then of course it's all been settled long ago and everything. I'd be simply too embarrassed for words."

That seemed to be the deal. She wanted the guy returned to her on a silver platter, presumably not to cure a broken heart, but so she'd be spared the embarrassment

of a last-minute jilting. I smiled politely and remarked: "Not much that can be done. There's no such thing as breach of promise any more in California."

"No, of course not," she said, and waited for me to wave my little magic wand, or whatever it was detectives were supposed to do.

"You've attempted to patch things up?" I asked.

"Oh, yes. I've phoned several times. He won't even speak to me."

"Let me try to explain, Miss De Jong," I offered patiently. "No matter what the circumstances are, a woman has no way of persuading any man to marry her. No other way, that is. I'm assuming you realize the shotgun treatment is *passé*. It's barely possible you might find an attorney, or even another private agency, who could rig up some kind of a stunt to help you out. I wouldn't know. I don't handle domestic relations cases at all. A question of policy."

"I see." She let me have a view of where her teeth were worrying those lovely sulky lips. I didn't think she saw, or wanted to.

"The coat is a different problem," I pointed out. She'd commenced to worry me, too; but a job is a job. "Now, if I understood Mr. Brownell, you received it from Mr. McElroy as a gift, last week. In that case it has, of course, become your property, and you're entitled to take steps to repossess. Do you have any evidence of ownership, apart from the fact that you had it insured in your name?"

"My monogram. It's been embroidered in the lining." She made it sound distant, as if she had almost lost interest.

"That might help; but embroidery can be removed. A bill of sale would be much better. But I expect the store has made one out in Mr. McElroy's name."

SHE rose and drifted over to the chrome-and-yellow-leather secretary and returned with a sheet of heavy tessellated steel-engraved parchment stationery. There was a huge imperial crown and the name, *Sascha of Beverly Hills*. Then a single typewritten line, and a crude, sprawling signature: *Prinze Alexander Romanoff*. The writing was businesslike, with no more than a touch of the baroque. *We hereby certify the value of one Aleutian blue mink coat, owned by Miss Leila De Jong, to-wit Twenty Thousand Dollars (\$20,000).*

It was the letter of appraisal Frank had seen, the one he'd had scaled down by his own man; the procedure is common with expensive furs; and of course the seller will always appraise at a figure corresponding to his price. I said it was fair enough, and looked at it some more and whistled, tunelessly. "This mink is *blue*?"

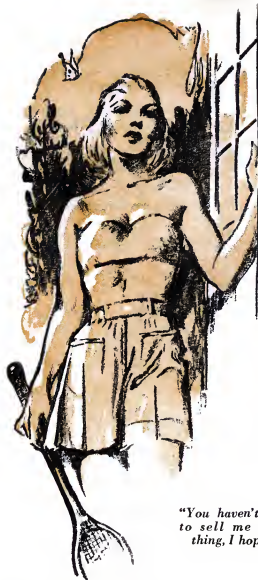
"Oh, no. Not actually. It's brown, you see, with just a gloss. Sascha designed it specially for me."

"And your fiancé took it away from you last night, after your quarrel? Have you any idea where it may be now?"

This time her smooth brown shoulders twitched. She was merely bearing with me. "I suppose he still has it at his hotel. The Regent-Plaza. If he's gone back to Vivian, he may have given it to her."

Women, I thought. The wonderful respect they show each other.

"The point is this," I said: "If you want to play nice, you'll need an attorney to file suit. He'll send the city marshal over with a writ to have your fur attached and brought into court. That means expense, and a lot of publicity, and the marshal can't act anyway unless you show him where. In a case like this, I'd have to find it for you first. But when I do, I may just as well go ahead and pick it up on your behalf. There's nothing wrong with that—you won't get into trouble, and neither will I, so long as I'm reasonably careful not to disturb the peace or anything. Repossession is perfectly legitimate in it-



*"You haven't come
to sell me some-
thing, I hope?"*

self, where you're prepared to prove your rights; the finance companies are forced to do it all the time. I can take care of it for you all right. May take me a day, or as much as a week, but the fee will be a flat three hundred dollars, considering the value of your property. That's fifty for expenses in advance, and the rest on delivery—no cure no pay."

She didn't mind listening, so far as I could tell. It was just that she couldn't seem to bring herself to care.

"I don't know. It sounds awfully dear."

"A lawyer would charge you three-four times as much."

"But why must I pay? The insurance—"

"You're not covered," I said. "You haven't lost the coat—not when you've allowed it to be removed from the premises, and you're unwilling to sign a police complaint. If you'll do that, you'll have it back tonight, but the story will go on the precinct blotter and scream at you from a front-page box in the morning *Post-Courier*, see pictures on Page Three."

She bit her lip for me some more. The wisteria eyes were definitely troubled now, but in the way she looked at me there was an element of speculation that I couldn't place.

"You're right, of course. I shouldn't like that very much," she said. "Are you sure you can handle it—well, inconspicuously?"

"No ma'am, I'm not sure. In my work I've got to depend for results on a combination of luck and experience. I've always managed to protect my clients, though."

She retrieved my card and went back to the secretary. "I'll write you a check, if that's all right. But you must

promise to be very careful, please. Keith can be difficult, sometimes. He has his own attorney, who is rather a cad."

"What's his name?"

"Fernandez, I think. He's a Mexican lawyer, downtown."

"I don't know him," I said. "There's nothing he could do about this, anyway."

She brought the check and presented it to me with a queenly little flourish. It was drawn for fifty dollars on the Wilshire and Rodeo Branch of the Merchants' Security Trust in a round, childish hand. I glanced about the room and asked: "You have a picture of Mr. McElroy you could spare?"

"Not here. I've one upstairs. But it's framed, and I don't think I'd care to part with it just yet." Her laugh was almost light and gay; she'd pulled a quickie switch of mood on me. "I'll let you see it, if you wish."

"You don't want me to risk a mistake in identity," I pointed out.

She was gone from the room in a flash of legs, before I had a chance to rise. I got up anyway and perched on the arm of the divan to light a cigarette. Through the open French doors from the patio came the distant hiss of sprinklers on the lawn. A liver-spotted yellow butterfly rode down a sunbeam to the spray of tearose blossoms on the mantelpiece. It drank its fill and hung around for me to snap a finger at it, and took off again in a perfect chandelle. Its shape and color made a bum out of that interior decorator. . . .

My elegant new client was holding up one of those library-size brown leather portrait mounts. I stared at the head and shoulders of a heavy-set, prosperous middle-aged citizen. The pose was captain-of-industry, gray bristling brows, commanding nose, receding hairline, small and close-cropped ears. The eyes bore directly into mine with a stolid executive gleam. I nodded and said: "About five-ten, two hundred pounds. Addicted to cigars and double-breasted suits."

She seemed surprised with me. "Why, yes, that's right. How can you tell?"

"Just a guess. We learn to size up a man from his picture somehow. He drives a Lincoln or a Cadillac."

"It's a Caddie, a black convertible. Last year's. Oh, golly, you are clever."

"Your plumber is too, when he fixes the kitchen drain. The Regent-Plaza, I think you said. And I'd better have the former Mrs. McElroy's address."

She gave it to me; it was way out on Country Club Drive. I made a note of it and tucked the paper work away, unhurriedly. I managed to bow myself out and to subdue the leer that was telling my tactful discretion to remove its hat.

It didn't occur to me until I was back in the car and on my way home to lunch that last night's argument must have been quite a show.

Chapter Three

DARLING, HONESTLY, YOU CAN BE SUCH AN idiot," the little woman said indignantly. Lunch was being served to me across the kitchen bar, a recent innovation in our home. According to the ad in *House Beautiful*, we were embarked upon a Glamorous Experience of Postwar Life.

"Oh, I don't know," I said, and complacently sank my teeth into turkey and relish on rye. "What's wrong with help'g out a lady in—uh—distress?"

"If you gobble your food," she instructed me, "you'll just grow ulcers, and lose weight, and get surly with me on top of everything. We agreed long ago that we couldn't afford to touch divorce work with a ten-foot

pole. Not if we want to make a decent reputation for ourselves."

"That 'we' stull again," I protested, and broke out my battle flag. "Now look, pussy cat, you run your hash counter here, and I'll see about paying the check and worry about my reputation. The divorce has got nothing to do with it. I'm handling this as just another case of recovering stolen property."

Suzy smiled at me. It was the kind of smile she'd given me before, on such occasions as when traffic at an intersection got too slow for me and made me honk my horn. She shook her auburn curls and leaned across the bar, her clear, silver-gray eyes caressing mine in something suspiciously like mock sympathy: one hundred and fifteen pounds of judiciously streamlined young woman from Dixie, equipped with a mind of her own, and fixing to supply me with a piece of same.

"The divorce," she informed me dulcetly, "does so have everything to do with it. This blonde of yours is simply using you for bait. She overplayed her hand last night and didn't realize it, not until this morning, when she tried to call the man and he refused to speak to her. Now she wouldn't mind losing her furs if she could only get her hooks back into him. She practically told you that herself."

"Well, what about it? I told her right back. The mink is all she gets, so far as I'm concerned. It's hers."

"But, Johnny, don't you understand? She let you go ahead with it because she decided she'd score the same result. After all, this McElroy man may be stubborn and a little queer, but he must be pretty crazy about her if he'd just divorced his wife on her account and intended to marry her this week. So she quarreled with him, and he stamped out of there last night with her coat on his arm, and now you come along and grab it away from him again. That gives him a shock and makes him mad, of course. There's nothing he can do except pick up the phone and start bawling her out some more. Which is exactly what she wants."

"Is it? You think that's her idea of having fun?"

"No, silly, but it works. She'll let him rave at her awhile to get it off his chest. Then she'll put on a crying spell, and swear to him that you or the Mutual people made her do it, that she doesn't want the coat and he can have it any time, she'd never have done such a thing if he hadn't left her so terribly upset and lonely and confused. If he wants it that way, she'll go return it to the shop herself, right now. That'll fix him, but good—I'd like to see the man it wouldn't. Even if he's already decided to call the whole thing off and go back to his wife, it'll fix him."

The dog Khan, our tawny Great Dane, brought up his massive black and yellow head from where it rested cozily between his paws on the cool kitchen-floor linoleum. He cocked one drowsy amber eye at us, inhaled the turkey smell and yawned prodigiously. I grinned and said: "There's the best answer I could give you, cherry pie. You may be right, at that, and even if you are, it doesn't matter very much. I'm not supposed to get excited over what occurs after I'm through with a case, as long as my part in it has been strictly legitimate and all. I'll just put the old arm on those furs, collect my bill and fade out quick. The lady can take it from there. If she gets this McElroy bird to jump through the hoop, that's his affair. He doesn't have to call her up, you know."

The little woman turned away and slammed the refrigerator door in the process of serving my ice-cream cake. "Three hundred dollars isn't such a lot of money," she reminded me disdainfully.

"You never can tell what the traffic will bear, honey doll. There are a lot of other fellows in this business, and it's a simple job."

"You hope," she pointed out, and flipped the switch on the new dishwashing machine. "If it comes to that, you don't know very much about these people, do you, Johnny?"

"All I need to know is where to find that mink."

She made the copper sparks flash in her curls again. "I think I'll call Sam Levy," she announced defiantly.

"Go right ahead," I said. "You won't learn a thing I can use, but I don't mind. Be careful not to give the show away."

She flounced out, and the dog pricked up his ears, then looked at me inquiringly. "Women," I told him, and he promptly sneezed, and with a shudder ducked his head between his paws.

I laughed and finished my dessert, put the plate in the washer and strolled into the den. Suzy was sulking in the client's lounge, the real leather one I'd had patched up last year, and staring at the phone with an air of determined expectation. I dropped into my creaky swivel chair and fired a cigarette.

"Have any luck?"

"Sam wasn't sure. He'll check and call me back."

I shrugged and nodded and smoked contentedly, inspecting the grim old Indian deathmask on the wall, the battered, half-empty war-surplus filing cabinet under it, the crossed shotguns and fishing rods on either side. It was cool in the den; the dog came padding in and switched his long stiff yellow tail for us, and did a lazy belly flop on the fireplace tiles.

The phone rang stridently. "Go on," I said. "Don't keep him waiting. There's your call."

"You take it. You're supposed to do the job."

"I don't need Sam to help me, angel-face."

"I think you do."

HER smile had a sweetly stubborn quality I'd learned to recognize ten years ago. I shrugged again and scooped up the receiver. Sam Levy, professional cynic and legman in chief of the *Post-Courier*, clucked his tongue when he heard my voice. "Aw, no, not you," he yowled at me. "You never gimme anything. Lemme talk to the bride, will you please? She promised me a story."

"You've known her long enough," I said.

"Yah! Another stall already. Just a damn information desk for you, that's me." He sounded pretty well resigned. "So okay, what's biting you now? I got some dope here, but it don't add up to anything. This McElroy, he's fifty-four, has lived here all his life. A promoter, the lone-wolf kind of schmoe; they finagle around all the time; one day it's oil and the next maybe lumber or real estate, or a chain of liquor stores. He got himself indicted up in Sacramento, back in '43, on a pinball protection deal, but it was a political rap, is what I hear, and they quashed it in court. That's all we have, except Toots Rickey on *Society*, she says he's got a wife and two small boys, but that the wife don't cut much ice, not in the women's clubs or on opening night at the Opera."

"Dull stuff," I said. "I figured it would be. Thanks anyway, Sam. I'll buy you a drink next time."

"Hey, keep your socks on—don't you wanna hear about the dame?"

"Which dame?" I asked him, carefully obtuse.

"This blonde, with legs yet," he shouted at me. "We got her pitcher here on file. Watch out, there, the bride sounded green-eyed to me when she brought it up."

"Oh, that one," I said. "That happens to be a different case. What cooks with her?"

"That's what we'd like to know. What kinda case you got?"

"Routine insurance deal."

He made a vulgar noise of disappointment. "Aw, I never get a break from you. You know my city ed—he loves that cheesecake angle. Human interest, he says. I

guess there's nothing here of any use to you. This De Jong is the name she's using in the movies, when she gets a part, like maybe in a jungle piece. Her real moniker is Mrs. Leila Bixby Kaufman Morrison. Used to be Social Register, Bar Harbor and Palm Beach, before she started combing all those husbands out of her hair."

"Those beauty treatments, were they local jobs?"

"Nuh-uh. It says here Florida, Nevada, Mexico, in that order. Must like variety. She hasn't been here long, at that. I remember Hal Sturgeon brought her out for Globe-International, last October, on a one-pic deal. She wound up on the cutting-room floor. Hal must've been doing a favor for a friend of his back East. . . . It's all yours, Jackson, compliments of the management. Come again," he invited me earnestly. "But not soon, you big-hearted gonif."

He slammed the phone. I hung up mine, grinned at Suzy, and discovered she wasn't around for me to grin at. Only the dog was there, still couched on the fireplace tiles and watching me with interest unblinking in his gleaming yellow eyes. I glanced in the direction of the kitchen, where the hum and clatter of the dishwashing machine had stopped. I shrugged, started whistling "Dixie" and left the den by way of the patio and walked out to my car.

I had opened the door to get in when Khan came quickly loping down the driveway after me, with that peculiar awkward rolling gait of a Great Dane who considers himself in a middling hurry, about like an elderly sailor in quest of a drink. He caught up with me before I could slam the door, shouldered me aside and gained the back seat in one clumsy jump and flopped in his favorite spot, on the floor of the car. I slapped his fierce black snout for him and told him to get out, but he just laughed at me. I glanced back at the house and got behind the wheel. I didn't think he'd cramp my style too much, this trip; and when after ten years a woman feels you need a chaperon, it must be love.

Chapter Four



THE REGENT-PLAZA USED TO RATE AMONG THE world's top dozen caravansaries, for something like the first ten years that followed its construction back in '25. It's still a multi-million-dollar enterprise which does not cater to traveling salesmen from Duluth, Minnesota, and which hires only name bands to perform in its loftily exotic Palm Grove dining-room. But the city has tripled in size and new hotels have been built in districts since become fashionable. This trend has left the Regent-Plaza to the tourist trade and to the local solid citizen.

It was a little after two that Thursday afternoon, when I turned off the boulevard and drove up the pepper-tree-lined esplanade. An attendant in starched white drill came running after me; I waved him off and slid by the porte-cochère and around the solarium terrace into the employees' parking lot. The place was familiar ground to me, the way a dog is familiar with other dogs' backyards. I reached behind the seat to pat Khan's hefty yellow neck, locked the car, and made the lobby through a service door.

The lobby was just as big and quiet and cool as a church and almost as dark, with its flowing Spanish draperies and wine-red tapestry. There were rows of potted plants in terra-cotta urns, and several cages of shyly twittering tropical birds. The only other sound came from the Exchange ticker on the counter of the stockbroker's concession. If you were people, you knew better than to raise your voice in there.

I waded over to the elevators and whisked up to mezzanine. In the north wing I passed by the balcony lounge

and rapped on a door marked *Service, No Entrance*, and walked into a brightly lighted, plainly furnished room. The walls were bare except for the usual calendar art, a battery of lockers and a bunch of filing cabinets. Five men in shirt-sleeves sat in a pinochle game around the corner table while a sixth was hunched behind his typewriter stand and typing rapidly away. He glanced at me and listened to me ask for Harry Rose. He jerked his thumb and pushed his empty shoulder holster back under his arm and clattered right along almost without a break.

I NODDED at him and walked on through to a door at the other end. This room was smaller, and its picture window offered a view of the lobby twenty feet below. It boasted walnut paneling, a Chinese rug and a small portable bar. Its occupant relaxed behind a *Racing Form* at the handsome walnut executive desk that faced the lobby window. He wore striped trousers, spats, a beautifully tailored morning coat and the traditional white carnation. He lifted a finger in greeting and simpered at me. It was quite a performance, unless you happened to know that he'd served with the FBI for seven years.

"Got something useful in the fifth, down at T.J.?" he asked me lazily.

"Lo, Harry," I said. "Stay out of those Mexican boneyards if you know what's good for you. There's a plater you'll find in the third, I hear tell she might run in the money. A three-year-old filly named R.U. Nuts."

"I know," he said. "I've got a deuce on her to show. She's a mudder." He pointed his chin at the window to draw my attention to the girl in bathing briefs and wrap who'd entered the lobby from the solarium. "That red-head's mudder," he explained regretfully. "And how are all the little papa-oranges and mamma-oranges getting along in your neck of the woods?"

"Just fine," I said. "They're having little baby limes like crazy."

He nodded composedly, as if I had proved his point and pulled in the portable bar with one foot. "Rye and plain?"

"So here's to crime."

"Which kind? You mean real sure-enough crime, or just a little-bitty crime, like maybe blowing up the joint?"

"Oh, well," I said. "You know. Crime."

"Sure, sure. You name it, we've got it. We made a pinch this morning—fellow tried to cart away a suitcase load of ashtrays packed in pillowslips. I'm getting pretty good myself; a hustler comes in now, and I can spot her at a hundred yards. . . . How's the agency racket with you?"

"No kicks. It's a living, in this screwy town."

"I'll bet it is," he said. "I'll just bet you my shirt to a plugged Canadian penny it is." He stared at me, curiously. "You wouldn't be here on business, Johnny, would you now?"

"A sordid thought," I said. "Business. Money. The rent and the groceries and the dentist's bill. Are you kidding? Of course I'm here on business."

He threw up his hands at me, palms out in horrified rejection. "Omigawd! Get him—he moves right in and drinks my liquor, listens to my gripes, wants I should feel good. Then he slips it to me he's come to tamper with my sacred trust and duty. Psychology, yet!" The phone rang on his desk and he snatched for the receiver. "Security, Rose! How's that again? . . . Well, what about it, so they had a fight and he locked her out? She's registered in that room as his wife, isn't she? If she wants back in, send a boy with the key. . . . Oh, great! If that's how it is, you better send a maid. And ring Casey on Ten to stand by. I'm in conference now; I don't want to play with it." He hung up and winked at me. "What kind of business?"

I told him what kind, and he made a face at me.

"No rough stuff," he warned me. "The boss won't stand for it."

"Not a chance. First we'll make sure he's in, so he'll have to admit me himself. Then I give him a flash of my junior Space Ranger badge, and shoot him a fast line of doubletalk while the mink is walking out of the room on my arm. It never fails—the surprise is what gets them every time."

"Uh-huh. Are you just clearing this with me, or do you think you'll need some professional courtesy?"

"Well, if you like," I said. "Might be convenient if there's an elevator happens to be waiting for me on his floor. In case he's the type who comes up for air too soon."

"Can do. But we'd better find out if he's really got your fur piece here, and where he's keeping it. I hope you can identify the property on sight, or you'll be in a mess."

"It has my client's initials in the lining."

"That was last night," he pointed out. "But then I don't suppose this guy McElroy has a dozen minks to clutter up his room." He pulled out a drawer and rifled through his index cards. "New customer. Suite 316. Been here four weeks. I never heard of him; a promoter, you say?"

"What Sam told me."

"Okay, let's see what we can promote on him." He took up the phone again and dialed on the intercom and gave instructions in a mumbling undertone. He laid the receiver on his blotter. "Don't get me wrong," he said. "I know you, Johnny, and I know you'll stay within your rights. Some of these private ops that come in here I wouldn't give the time of day, and some of them we bounce but hard, the minute they show up. As it is, I'll be honest with you, I'd just as soon pack this fellow off the premises and let you handle him outside. I'm not worried about his beef, if he makes one, but you've got to remember where a leak on this could lose us twenty-thirty guests."

"No leaks," I promised him. "Not even to my client. I don't see him beefing much, either. No way he could do that and save his face."

HARRY's phone on the blotter squawked, and he picked it up. He listened and grunted and put it back on its prongs and offered me a dubious grin.

"McElroy's in," he informed me smugly. "But you're out of luck, m'boy. The housekeeper checked him this morning, and she claims there's not a stitch of feminine apparel in the joint, much less a whole fur coat."

"What made her check?"

"You would ask. Sure, he did have it, and the maid reported when she saw it on the sofa in his living-room. A place like this, we've got to have a system. He must've taken it away before the housekeeper looked in. Bell captain says he left at nine, with a suitcase."

"And he came back again," I said.

"Uh-huh. So he did, around noon, only minus the keister. We don't let any luggage in or out that the captain doesn't know about. Don't be unreasonable, Johnny. He's got it stashed somewhere—some other woman, maybe, or a storage vault, or he's returned it to the shop for credit."

"I guess you're right," I said, not very cheerfully. "That means I'll have to sit on his tail, after all, and in this heat. Thanks anyway, Harry. Don't let the system get you down."

He slumped in his chair and simpered at me some more and fluttered a benediction. In the bull pen next door the pinocchio game had a couple of kibitzers now, but the typewriter artist had disappeared. I took the stairs down from the balcony and waded back across the lobby to the parking lot.

It took me ten minutes to locate McElroy's car among several hundred parked in neatly serried rows on the same tarmac apron that adjoined the esplanade. There were quite a few Caddies, but only the one black convertible, the fishtail model with a lot of chromium and swank accessories. The top was raised to keep the pigskin upholstery from broiling in the sun. The registration tag strapped to the steering column in plain view still had the Country Club address; the tachometer on the dashboard showed a little over twenty thousand miles. I was looking at seven or eight thousand dollars' worth of automobile, just exactly the kind of jalopy for a solid citizen with mink coats to dispense.

I took a peek in the tonneau and brought myself up short. The suitcase was there, a large new airplane-style with gold-plated lock and clasps, dropped carelessly between the seats. I clicked my teeth and reached for it. I had no illusions about it; I just didn't want to miss any bets. It came up on a finger, much too easily.

"Yes sir, is this your car?"

The white-coat attendant had sneaked up behind me, a husky youngster with a leery eye. His tone had an edge of false solicitude that was sharp enough to open a can of beans. I stared at him and said: "You ought to know. It's Harry Rose's." He asked me to pick up the grip.

The boy relaxed, and his manner changed to a mixture of cockiness and uneasy deference. "This ain't it," he instructed me, and pointed to the tag. "You want the other lot, in back. Mr. Rose drives a Buick, not a Cad," he added, more scornful than suspicious.

I said I was new here, and thanked him, and packed myself off. It didn't matter very much; the suitcase was empty, of course. It had been used to take my client's precious furs somewhere more sheltered than a room in a hotel with nosy maids. Harry Rose had summed up the only three logical alternatives: another girl, a storage vault or the shop in Beverly Hills.

SOMEHOW I had a hunch there was another girl involved. My client's misgivings about the former Mrs. McElroy appeared to be unjustified; if they were not, it would be hard to see why Mr. Mac should still be occupying his apartment at the Regent-Plaza. But middle-aged men who have recently crashed out of matrimonial jail have something of a reputation for emotional instability.

If that was it, I could pretty much count on catching them together on a dinner date, that very night. And the mink would be there, in spite of the heat: for a while it would be draped with affected nonchalance around dainty white shoulders, and presently it would be folded back across the chair. At that moment a man I knew would have finished his meal and paid his check and generously tipped his waiter. He would get up and light a cigarette and proceed to the door in a leisurely stride. He would be tall, dark and reasonably handsome, conservatively dressed and quietly mannered. In passing a certain table he would drop his cigarette and bend to retrieve it, only to find it had rolled out of reach under a certain lady's chair. He would so inform the lady, make due apology in tones of urgency and hold both chair and coat so she might rise to protect her hosiery and dress from fire.

Her escort would be on his feet by then, and the man with the coat on his arm would take him aside. There would be the flick of an open wallet before his eyes, and a whisper in his ear, and those inevitable seconds of shock and bewildered surprise while the man walked away with the coat. Then reaction, the need for an instant decision: give up the game and explain to the lady as best he could, or the hopeless grandstand play, the big commotion on the spot. The melodramatics of "stop that man!" the embarrassing conference in the manager's office, the identifications, the letter from the shop, the tears and the angry names. . . .

I unlocked my car and shuttled it over to the western edge of the employees' parking lot, with the windshield facing the esplanade. Any vehicle leaving the main lot would have to make a horseshoe turn through the porte-cochère and pass in front of me some hundred feet away, in second gear. I wasn't especially proud of myself, but a job is a job and property rights are property rights. Khan was asleep and snoring peacefully. The clock on my dashboard said three-fifteen. I slumped behind the wheel, perspiring quietly in the shadow of the pepper trees and smoking another cigarette whenever my eyelids began to feel as if they needed a brace of toothpicks to keep them ajar.

THE arc lights on the esplanade came on a little after seven, and by seven-thirty it was almost night. The dog woke up and yawned and nudged me from behind. I let him out to frisk about the lawn and slobber his fill at the fountain pond and commune with the fireplug on one corner of the driveway to the tennis courts. I was commencing to grow a trifle restless about the deal; when Khan reported back, I locked him in once more and strolled around the building to the porte-cochère. The black convertible still sat in its appointed slot on the main tarmac, fifty yards away.

I mumbled to myself and went into the lobby, making for the battery of house phones on the wall between the newsstand and the registrations desk. A voice with a Princeton accent told me Harry Rose was gone for the day. It asked politely if there might be something on my mind. I considered the point and firmly rejected the obvious reply and inquired if Harry had left word about a little matter in Room 316. The Princeton accent coughed, somewhat austere, and required my name. Its supply brought a second cough, still more deprecatory.

"Ah, yes, of course. We seem to have established that the article you're interested in is not in this hotel."

"You wouldn't know what has been keeping this McElroy lad?" I asked. "He wouldn't be entertaining a visitor, by any chance?"

There was a pause. "The guest is in the bar of the Aloha Room," the Princeton accent said reluctantly. "He is alone. Please do not create a disturbance."

"*Discordia fit carior concordia*," I said. "If you remember your Publilius, my friend. Tell Harry I'll send him a bunch of daisies with my thank-you note."

The Aloha Room opened off the lobby in the southern wing. It was a more or less informal grill, and patronized chiefly by residents of the hotel who disdained the coffee-shop bill of fare, yet did not want to bother with the Palm Grove's atmosphere of gala catering. The bar was small, two oval tiers, half a dozen tables each, and with a single fluorescent tube over the counter for its only source of light. There were sixty or seventy people crowded inside; but I didn't have to pick them over in the dark: I was practically breathing down his neck, the minute I stuck my face into the joint. He was right there under the light, both elbows on the old mahogany, wrestling a hunk of Scotch. He still had the small flat ears, the jutting nose, the harsh gray brows, but his pose was very different from the one in the picture. The stolid features, what I saw of them in semi-profile, sagged into a brooding scowl. I squeezed through the crowd behind his back and made a beeline for the washroom, used it to advantage and proceeded to a phone booth in the rear.

The little woman answered on the second ring. She sounded annoyed. "Your supper's getting cold—"

"That's why I called. You better not wait up for me, sugar lamb. I'll grab a hamburger somewhere."

"Oh, Johnny! Now tell me that this was your first chance to get to a phone!"

"A rear-end job," I said complacently. "There's nothing for it now but stick. I have a funny feeling this

all just for the exercise. I'm looking at the guy right now, tanking up, and he's making like *Romeo* lost in the wilderness."

"You mean you think he's going back to her?" she demanded indignantly.

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised, cherry pie. There was something they taught us in college, about lovers' quarrels and stuff. This afternoon I had a different idea, only it doesn't seem to jell."

"You might as well come home, if that's the way it is," she needles me. "This blonde of yours will just refuse to pay the bill. She might even stop payment on that fifty-dollar check you wangled out of her and claim she doesn't owe you anything, since you didn't deliver."

I laughed and said: "Don't worry, chicken, it's been cashed—which is one reason why I can't afford to drop the ball just yet."

She hung up, and I pursed my lips at her ten miles away and followed suit. Mr. Keith McElroy was leaving the bar and making for the grill in a slightly uncertain stride. I waded after him and watched the smiling Chinese maitre d' take him in tow. The Aloha Room was doing a roaring business that night, but there's always a table for the steady customer. They got him settled at one by himself, with a menu in one hand and a Scotch in the other, and with a waiter and two busboys making a fuss over him. He still wasn't happy, but that was all right—I meet lots of unhappy people in my line of trade.

A shadower nudged me and a voice said in my ear: "You working this alone?"

The typewriter artist who'd jerked his thumb at me that afternoon in Harry Rose's bull pen leaned against the bamboo screen, less than a foot away. He was a chunky little man in carefully pressed gray flannels, so unobtrusive that it wouldn't really have surprised me if he had quietly disappeared through a crack in the wall.

"If you can call it work," I said. "You girls don't like to miss much, do you now?"

"We manage to get by."

"You can stop suffering. I won't start anything."

This time he briefly glanced at me and shrugged, almost indolently. "Not here you won't," he promised me, without asperity.

"Then why the interest?"

"No special reason. We figured if you were alone, you might could use a feed." He nodded at the coffee shop across the lobby.

I GRINNED at him and said I appreciated that and wandered away. At the coffee-shop counter they gave me a salad, a porterhouse medium rare, a baked potato and a dish of strawberry ice cream. The evening was too hot for eating fast, but not quite hot enough to kill your appetite. By nine-fifteen I was still lingering over my second iced tea when the gray little man came strolling in and hopped up on the counter seat adjoining mine. He ordered a coke and ignored me pointedly. I paid my check and wandered back toward the entrance of the grill.

My quarry had just finished paying his check.

Mr. Keith McElroy left the Aloha Room and crossed the length of the Regent-Plaza lobby to the parking lot. He was wearing a dove-gray Homburg and smoking a large cigar, and he appeared less dejected than an hour before, in the bar. He passed within a yard or so from where I was supposed to be examining the early-morning headlines at the news-stand front. I cut in behind him and left the hotel by the side exit past the florist shop and got into my car, with fully a minute to spare before the night attendant could have brought the black convertible into the porte-cochère.

It came humming in second around the bend at last, and I gave it the length of the driveway esplanade to

the stop light at the public boulevard before starting the Packard in leisurely pursuit.

It was a long chase, including many turns and twists and changes of pace, and one stop to use the telephone at a filling station. It ended at long last when he pulled up short in front of the Chateau Bayard.

The Chateau Bayard is ten stories of glass brick and mulberry concrete, a heart-shaped swimming pool and no inconvenient questions asked.

Most of its tenants are ladies of expensive leisure and considerable charm, some of them probably quite respectable.

The black convertible sat empty at the curb. I shoved the Packard in behind it and got out. Most of the windows in the place were dark; it was a little after ten, but Hollywood either retires or goes out stepping earlier than that.

I'll never know what changed my disposition at that point—my notion that McElroy had another girl on tap looked as solid as the hills. That's all there was to it, relax and wait. Yet within sixty seconds of my pulling up behind the black convertible I'd sold myself the quaint idea that I should go on in and check the lady's name and her apartment number right away.

Now, in most cases, that's a simple little chore. There are a dozen different ways it can be handled, and of course it's often necessary to results. As it happened, I needed the information the way I needed another head. Miss Leila De Jong had hired me to repossess her furs, not to canvass her backsliding bridegroom's amours. I had no intention whatever of telling her where and who, and even less of staging a raid on the joint and taking the coat by force.

THE lobby of the Chateau Bayard had been decorated in a French Provincial motif, low-roofed and narrow. There were the elevator doors, a small reception desk, a dozen potted plants and not a single comfortable seat. The clerk on duty was the only soul in sight—a slim blond youngster who had an open lawbook in his lap.

I showed him my cigarette lighter and said: "Fellow went into the building a minute ago. I saw him drop this on the lawn outside. Just happened to notice when my headlights picked it up. Took me awhile to find a parking spot. Tallish chap, no hat, blue sports coat, flannel pants. Know who he is?"

The clerk obliged by looking duly mystified. "No sir, I don't," he said, agreeably enough. "No one like that has been in here since eight o'clock. Seems kind of late for sports clothes anyway," he added.

"It does, at that," I said and pushed my Ronson over to him on the desk. "This has an M engraved. Would that mean anything to you?"

He shook his head. "We've got some M's," he granted doubtfully. "There's a couple of ladies, and there's Mr. Margolies in 815—he's out of town. The only gentleman came in just now I've never seen before. But he wore a hat, so he can't be your man."

"His name start with M?"

"You'd have to ask him, sir. I didn't speak with him. He's not a guest, and we don't announce visitors on this floor." He nodded at the corridor that branched away beyond the elevator hall. "Those are private unfurnished apartments on a yearly lease," he explained. "They've got their own phones, and we don't service them."

I picked up the Ronson and nodded to him and mentioned carelessly I could be wrong; maybe it had been the Bel Monte next door where I'd seen the man go in. I took a few steps back across the terra-cotta tiles and caught a glimpse of Crescent Circle through the porte-cochère.

The black convertible was gone.



The clerk with the lawbook in his lap didn't make any move to stop me when I swung around and walked into the corridor.

My first impression was that I'd been spotted, after all. I threw it out because it made no sense—McElroy could never have guessed I'd get out of the car and give him a shot at leaving unobserved. Yet it seemed odd he hadn't spent five minutes inside the Chateau Bayard.

There was no mystery about the way he'd left. Beyond the elevator hall the corridor ran straight for sixty feet or so between blank walls. At its end it was crossed like a T by a glassed-in Mexican gallery open at both ends. The gallery gave access to the swimming pool in rear and to the driveway ramp on either side. Six apartments, a door and three windows to each, ran the length of the gallery right of way. Their occupants could obviously be expected not to bother with the lobby exit while they had their own.

I HAD the answer then: McElroy didn't know the layout very well. He'd presumably been there before, but in the dark he had preferred to enter through the lobby where he couldn't miss. His date had been waiting for him, and they'd left by the driveway while I was busy outsmarting the clerk and incidentally myself. Now what I needed was to get back on the ball, but quick. That meant a tour of some fifteen or twenty night-clubs, scattered around the immediate neighborhood. With any luck I could still pin them down and go into my act.

There seemed to be a party going on in 106, at the northern end of the gallery. I walked due south and passed by 103, which was in darkness, then by 102, which showed a light behind Venetian blinds. The light being there should have served to discourage my interest in the place, but the noise clawed at my ears and stopped me cold. The noise was something like a string of .22's

going off on a nearby rifle range, supported by a bunch of fighter planes at fifteen thousand feet.

The casements were open behind the protection of insect screens. Between the slats of the Venetian blinds the noise came pouring out in a constant, unwavering stream of raucous dissonance. It refused to be diagnosed or classified as to its source; it merely advertised, insistently, that things were out of line.

I listened to it for a while and winced a little when the party back in 106 produced a particularly strident counterpoint. Then I noticed the door wasn't closed, its rims just the tiniest bit off the jamb and emitting a razor streak of light. I felt the muscles in my neck go stiff. This wasn't anything for me, but real trouble has an odd quality—you're either conditioned to run from it, or you plunge right on in. The door took a fistful of knuckles and silently swung inward.

It takes a good strong stomach to look upon violent death. I've seen plenty of it, and I still need a drink pretty bad. This particular deal was kind of a rugged show. The body wore slippers, pajamas and a black silk dressing-gown, with an elaborate gold-braid cachet on the breast. It lay on its back in a crazy sprawl, half on the floor, half on the studio couch, a man in his twenties with wavy black hair and a handsomely muscular build. Too much blood had congealed on his face, transforming it into a staring crimson mask turned to the ceiling in a ghastly grin of agony.

There was blood on his hands, flung wide apart, from the bone-deep cuts across several fingers and one palm: he had tried to protect himself from the knife, and it had slashed right through and carved the left side of his throat almost clean to the vertebrae. The blow had dropped him in his tracks, and the blood had drained from him where he lay in a vast and gory mess, soaking the couch and the Chinese rug in front of it, spreading in slick black rivulets on the polished hardwood floor.

I tore my eyes away. The noise I'd heard was not a puzzle any more. It issued from the big blond-maple Magnavox across the room, a torrent of high-volume static that crackled and droned along with the mulish persistence of a dentist's drill. The effect in there was enough to freeze your spine. I walked over to it on carefully squacmish toes and jerked the plug. The silence was just as unnerving.

The Magnavox was in bad shape. It was an expensive machine, but somebody had ripped off its doors and kicked in the television screen and spilled a lot of records from the built-in storage cabinet. The controls were set on phonograph, from what I could make out; but both the turntable and automat were bare. Suddenly I swore in surprise. Behind the ruined screen, where the TV tube and a lot of tricky wiring should have been installed, there was nothing at all but empty space.

I didn't like that. It put a screwy touch on things, and a screwball killing is usually hell on wheels for all concerned. Up to that point I'd been fairly resigned to start calling the cops and get it over with, but now I wanted out. The phony screen made it look as if someone might get hurt.

The lad on the couch had been doing all right for himself, up to now. His quarters were sharp as a tack, a cozy bachelor's establishment, well-kept though furnished with perhaps a shade of swank. The scheme appeared to be dull gold and Kelly green: couch and two love-seats in gold tulle, two easy chairs in green brocade. Green rugs, gold draperies, green lampshades trimmed with gold. In the bedroom beyond the arch a king-size double bed, the spread of gold damask green-fringed and tasseled, pillow covers green and gold. A two-track mind, if there is such a thing. The painting over the

bed said no. It was quite a big painting, too, and its voice had indelicate authority on this point. I pursed my lips at it and turned to the desk with the phone.

The desk was a custom-built piece, black walnut with a mirror top. It confronted a second mirror on the wall flanked in by fluorescent tubes. For a woman, it would have made a dandy vanity, but its usefulness to a man seemed a trifle specialized. There were lots of bottles and jars, and a stack of books in careless disarray. In the center a space had been cleared about one foot square, where some bulkier object had staked and abandoned its claim.

I was touching the phone when Hogan spoke up from the living-room, casually: "You enjoying yourself?"

"Lo, Dave," I said, and lifted two fingers to him in the mirror. "Yeah, this is swell. Come on in and make yourself to home."

"You bust this guy?" he inquired dispassionately.

That center space on the desk was beginning to worry me some. I couldn't figure out what he'd been keeping there. The size didn't fit most things you come across. Sergeant Ramon Garcia pushed in through the arch and ran his hands all over me from armpits down to socks.

"Clean," he announced, regrettably succinct. "Maybe he parked the shiv, Lieutenant," he added hopefully.

On the desk some talcum powder had been spilled, and I noticed the imprint of two little circular rubber supports. There had probably been two more, which indicated weight as well as size. A portable typewriter might have filled the bill. I looked around for one and missed. In the living-room Hogan was facing the fireplace and talking by himself.

"Schwartz, Frazer," he said. "You can pack up the works and come on down. Call Homicide from where you're at. I got a suspect here I'm taking in." He turned back to me and continued: "Okay, on our way."

"So you've bugged the joint," I suggested innocently.

He merely stared. Garcia grabbed my arm and rode me out of there.

Chapter Five



O YOU WAS LOOKING FOR A PIECE OF FUR," said Hogan, heavily.

His craggy features had retained their lack of guile; the rock-hard clear blue eyes kept drilling mine, not telegraphing either skepticism or belief. "Insurance job?"

"That could be it," I said defiantly.

"What company you working for?"

I glanced around. Garcia had seated himself at the desk and was scribbling away on his notes. Sergeant Dan Matson leaned against the door, surveying the back of my neck with an implacable and brooding hostility. The clock on the wall above the county map said 11:25. We'd been kicking the ball for not much more than twenty minutes yet.

"Let's put it this way, Dave," I said. "If I'm a witness, you've a right to ask me to cooperate. As a suspect, I'm only supposed to play it dumb and see my lawyer."

"You got it wrong. The way we figure in a homicide, any witness who don't give a satisfactory account of himself, he's a suspect already."

"Then go ahead. Bring out your rubber hose."

"We got all night. What company you working for?"

I laughed at him, not very heartily, and said: "Oh, knock it off, for goodness' sake. If I tell you the story, it won't mean a thing unless you check. If you do, it'll blow up my end of the show and cost my client twenty thousand bucks, not to mention some very corny publicity. The backfire on that one ought to be a cinch to put me out of business. How cooperative can you get?"

"How come you picked this place? Who tipped you off?"

"If you mean the apartment house," I said, "there's no honest reply I can make to that without spilling the works."

We had us another pause.

"A piece of fur worth twenty grand," said Hogan. "Stolen goods?"

"Misplaced, is more like it."

"They don't pay off on that."

"I never said they would. The owner wants it back."

He said, "Oh," without sounding surprised and inquired: "Movie people?"

"You're getting warm."

"Must be pretty hot stuff, at that price. A sable wrap, say."

"Quit fishing," I said. "There's no bait on your hook."

"I think there is."

HE had me staring at him now, the kind of stare that goes with a ten-dollar raise on a pair of aces showing. "Nice footwork," I said. "Just give me a minute or so, and I'll try to catch up. It's all this excitement makes my reflexes a little slow."

"What's so tough about that?" he demanded. "You want me to draw you a map? So Cliff Bush was a cop, and somebody shoved him around. He was off-duty when it happened, sure, but we still got to give it a play. That don't mean we start running in circles or picking on innocent guys. I dropped in myself tonight for a little pow-wow with Cliff, in a business way, and I found you there. You say you was just passing by when you heard this funny noise, and so you grabbed a peek—"

"You saw me reaching for the phone," I said.

"Yeah, I saw you. And you been around long enough so's you'd keep your mitts off things where there's been killing done."

"Oh, go on with you, Dave," I said. "No killer has been known to oblige with his prints on the victim's phone for twenty years."

"Police routine. You can't beat it, Johnny. Nobody can. Okay, so you was on the spot, and maybe it don't figure you're the guy. You're still a suspect, and I got no option but to take you in. The law don't say I got to book you, though. It don't say I'm supposed to finagle the name of your client out of you, or the name of your mother-in-law. It only says I got to question you until I'm satisfied you was there for a legitimate reason, is all. I ain't satisfied yet."

When they start to go reasonable on you, that's when it's time to douse the smoking lamp and man your battle stations, but in this case there was just a chance he might be on the square. In a way I'd been lucky, with him on the job: we'd been friends for some years, for as much as a cop is ever anybody's friend.

"It's a mess, Dave," I said. "You know perfectly well there's nothing I'd like better than to help you out. But I've already told you everything I can and keep my customers from picketing. Those furs were fancy mink, if it makes any difference to you. They belong to a movie actress, like you guessed, and she was referred to me by the people who pay for my butter and eggs."

"That all there was to it?"

I nodded and said that was all, and he raked me over with another deadpan stare.

"Okay," he said, and the desert was never as dry. "Drop by in the morning and sign the script."

"You mean you're releasing him?" Matson demanded, hoarsely perplexed.

"Got any evidence against him I can hold him on?"

The big cop took a step in my direction, and his sallow face was flushed and laboring with rage. "Not yet,"

he growled. "Gimme fifteen minutes alone with him, and we'll see."

Hogan said mildly: "Sure, you can have fifteen minutes. Right now. Alone with a glass of beer."

"You mean you want me to beat it, Lieutenant?" he asked uncertainly.

"Can't get beer in this dump."

There was another of those silences. Then Matson said, "It's your office, Lieutenant," suddenly calm and venomous. He turned on his heels and marched to the door. From the threshold he asked: "You frisk this guy?"

"He don't carry a shiv," Garcia assured him sarcastically.

The door slammed shut, almost cracking the walls. I raised an eyebrow after it and said: "Want me to stick around until the night captain gives you a buzz?"

"Nah, it's all set," said Hogan indifferently. "Captain'll tell him to go on home and shake off them jitters. Him and Cliff was supposed to be pals. 'Course he don't know about the way we figure this."

"So one gathers," I said. "That was the only reason why you put me through the mill tonight. Sometimes you boys are just plain cute, like a little red toy train. What if I'd mentioned that dictaphone up the chimney. You were not dropping by to have a chat with Bush. You were listening in on the bug, and the radio bothered you, and when I turned it off, that was when you decided to come up for air and a quick look-see."

GARCIA was out from behind the desk already, and blocking the door again, his swarthy young Latin face blankly inscrutable. His boss flapped a hand at him in weary dismissal and said: "Aw, hell, you know how it is. You seen for yourself what kind of place the guy was living at. And him a Vice Squad sergeant, four years' seniority."

"Maybe his uncle died and left him a couple of oil wells," I said.

"Yeah, maybe. We hear different. Listen, this stuff is kind of confidential. They got the party racket in this county started up again."

"A little bird in the hotel business already told me."

"That so? We been pinching the shacks for six months. It's a dud—we ain't got a conviction yet. This mob keeps moving 'em around like crap joints, and they must of got tipped off on every raid. Now you know what that means: they been feeding the juice to a Vice Squad cop."

"And you thought of Bush," I said. "Because he flashed a roll. I'd've changed his assignment and tried again."

"No good. That way we knock off a few hustlers, is all."

I knew exactly what he meant. In a city like this one, organized prostitution can be a very bad deal. It starts out with a couple of small-time yeggs who line up a handful of girls and a suitable piece of real estate. Then in a year or two you've got it all: the cribs running wide open in every neighborhood, the genuine blow-in-the-bottle protection syndicate. The inevitable sidelines of blackmail and dope. The wholesale bribery of politicians, judges, cops.

You can save the taxpayers quite a piece of money and grief by wading in early and wrecking the setup before it gets out of hand. You're not after the girls; they'll always be there, and as long as they stick to their trade they'll be useful to you in yours—witnesses, stool pigeons, sucker bait. What you want is the boss racketeer and his runners who make the collections and keep things in line. You try to nail them on conspiracy and felony-pandering raps, if you can get the evidence. And one fine way to get the evidence is by rigging a trap for them at the first

occasion where you've reason to suspect they're putting in the fix, with one of your own men.

"We laid an egg," said Hogan, placidly.

"You mean the bug didn't catch anything for you?"

"We just started this morning. You think it's easy, lousing up a guy like Bush, who knows the ropes? Took us three weeks to find a spot they'd let us string a wire on the q.t. Private garage, about a block away."

"But you were listening tonight," I said.

"Sure, we was listening. We got Bush coming in at eight. He stomps around awhile and mumbles to himself, like he don't feel so hot. He mixes a drink in the kitchen and turns on the news on KFI, then turns it off again and starts practicing up on his lessons, reading out loud. Dramatic school."

"Oh, Lord and butter," I said. "Another would-be movie actor!"

"Yeah, that's right. 'Course we knew about that; it don't mean nothing much, except them courses cost a pack of dough. So for a while he dishes out the ham, and by nine-thirty he gets tired of it and puts a stack of records on that big machine of his. Some kind of long-hair stuff, but good and loud."

"Tchaikovsky's Fifth," Garcia smoothly prompted.

"I wouldn't know. He fouled us up with it. About nine-fifty-five there's Deputy Schwartz—he's got the e-phones on—claims he can hear the phone ring in the bedroom, but he ain't too sure. Then awhile after that the music stops, and the machine just keeps humming and popping off. We figure Bush has gone to sleep, but by ten-thirty when you cut the switch and pussy-foot around in there, we get a little curious."

I didn't blame him. It all made sense: the Magnavox had blocked his microphone. For an hour it had drowned any sound in the apartment weaker than a pistol shot. We knew by inference that sometime in that hour there must have been a knock on Bush's door, and the voice of a caller he'd known well enough to admit—a long-drawn argument, perhaps, or just a brief quarrel, and then, suddenly, the rapid footfalls on the parquet floor, the stifled scream, the couch's hollowly protesting springs. And more: the killer's strident breathing and the hasty noises of his search, the clatter of the television screen smashed in to bare a freakish hiding-place. All these would have been audible enough but for the music and the static brawl monopolizing Hogan's "bug."

"The guy was looking for some kind of record there," I said. "He must've found it, too. First thing he tried the cabinet, and then he snatched them off the phonograph. That stopped Tchaikovsky, and it gained him nothing but a lot of noise. It's a pretty fair guess he got mixed up on the controls, and out of sheer frustration kicked the screen. Which was where Bush had kept what he was after."

HOGAN said grudgingly: "Could be you'd make a middling useful deputy, at that."

"I'm thinking of running for Sheriff next year," I said. "What are you waiting for, Dave? All it takes is to round up this mob and run 'em through the wringer, fast. You know what happened—Bush must have made a transcription of his talks with them, sometime ago. Then he'd've edited himself out of the record, re-transcribing it so it would sound like evidence that only implicated them, and hold it back for future reference where he could tie them up in knots if they went sour on him. That combination radio of his could do the job all right; he probably used it a lot to check on his own readings for dramatic school. But they found out and took a chance on busting him and grabbing off the play." I saw his face, and pursed my lips. "Don't tell me how it's been six months, and you don't have a line on who they are."

Garcia sniffed at me, defensively contemptuous. Hogan said flatly: "I told you already. We laid an egg."

"What's wrong with letting Matson in on this?"

"A cop gets killed, we don't allow his partner on the case."

"Why not? He seems anxious enough, and he's likely to know a few things that might give you a lead."

"The boys on Homicide'll ask him about those."

He was reminding me the Confidential Squad was, after all, not directly concerned with catching murderers; its task was to keep tabs on the corruption angle, and its policy would hardly be to trust the partner of a man who'd almost certainly been guilty of accepting "juice." I shrugged it off and climbed down from the desk. The minute hand on the electric clock jumped to 11:56.

"Don't say it, Dave," I begged him earnestly. "You want me to go home and skip this deal. Which is exactly what I have in mind."

Chapter Six



HE PACKARD WAS WAITING FOR ME IN THE prow-car parking lot. They had let me drive it over by myself when they arrested me, they'd been so sure I wouldn't slip the hook.

Khan had his paws up on the rear seat ledge. He'd watched the building from the minute I went in with them. He knew all about cops: they had a certain scent about them, and they were the only people who should be allowed to carry guns. The scent did not please him, and the guns were very bad indeed, but for some silly reason he wasn't supposed to take any cops apart. The stocky white-haired one would walk right into the house sometimes, and the family would laugh at him and give him food, and all the time he'd have this gun on him in a smelly leather contraption under his arm.

I got in, and the dog nudged my shoulder and dropped back to sleep on the floor. I finished my last cigarette, leaned on the starter, and eased the car off county property into the boulevard.

Around midnight is when they start rolling up the sidewalks in this town. I drove past a couple of movies and maybe half a dozen bars and a drugstore or two that were still showing lights. At Las Palmas there may have been four or five other cars in sight, and possibly fifteen or twenty pedestrians. Two of these seemed about to take off on the crosswalk, and one had already left the curb, a paunchy citizen in slacks, horse-blanket jacket and a pastel sport-shirt open at the neck. I kicked the brakes, and he stropped past my bumper, taking his time and neatly distracting my attention from the other lad, who had hung back and quietly opened the car door.

"Ride with ya to Fairfax, please, huh, Mister?"

The voice was a curiously blatant nasal whine, and for a hitchhiker, he sounded pretty arrogant. I glanced at him, surprised, and saw a fairly typical dude of the special Hollywood and Vine: green zoot-suit pants, Hawaiian T-shirt, coat of brown suede, a snapbrim Panama pulled down to shade the snubnosed vicious-rabbit mug.

"Bad guess, Jack," I said. "Try that big yellow bus coming up behind."

The door on my side jerked open, and the paunchy character who'd stalled me at the crosswalk dug a shoulder into me and crowded me back from the wheel. The snub-nosed lad slid in, his pocket bulging, and prodded me under the ribs. The bulge felt round and hard; whatever it was he had in there might go off, and again it might not. I wasn't disposed to take a chance on it. A stickup is always a risky affair, but it's the heroes who get hurt in them.

They had me sandwiched in between them, and the paunchy one was calmly driving my car down the boulevard. The shrill-voiced one kept feeding me the standard line of patter they all have on tap. "Easy, Mister, take it easy now. Don't start anything, ya gonna be awright. Just lay ya mitts on ya knees an' hold 'em there—that's it, Mister, that's swell, ya doing great!"

His unencumbered hand traveled all over me, groping, exploring. He found my wallet right away, but it was in an awkward spot from where he had to work. I used the time to memorize his profile and observed his fat-faced pal was wearing cotton gloves, which for a heister is a bit unusual: most of them don't seem to care about leaving their prints. Then I noticed what had come up in the rearview mirror and caught my breath.

"Ya don't carry much stuff, do ya, Mister, huh?"

"You guys listen to me," I said tightly. "Now get this straight—if that's really a gun you have there, you're fresh out of luck. There's a dog behind you who could lick a grizzly bear, and he's been trained to smell out guns. He's sniffing at you right now. If he makes up his mind that you've got one, he'll tear you to pieces."

They heard me, all right; they could tell I was worried, and not about the gun. The fat one grunted in surprise and touched the brakes; the whiney one stiffened against me and stopped fumbling through my clothes.

"Ya kidding us, Mister. Ya wantcha belly fulla slugs?"

"I'm not kidding," I promised him urgently. "For God's sake, both of you, bail out while you've still got a head on your neck! Don't look around. Don't even stop the car. Don't try to shoot—he's much faster than you, and I've already seen him kill two other characters who pulled a gun on me. Go on, move!"

"Grr-off!"

The Great Dane had uncoiled himself and suddenly seemed to fill the car to the roof. His growl, in those narrow confines, had all the power and the menace of a lion's roar; his ferocious muzzle, slaverling black lips withdrawn from gleaming fangs, was poised aloft, two hundred pounds of bone and muscle cocked behind it for the strike. In the flickering half-light that entered the windows from the boulevard his pose achieved an incredible menace, and would easily have served to terrify worse rogues than these.

I HAD to grab the wheel and wrench it around before we'd pile up on the curb. They had dived through the doors on each side and were tumbling and rolling on the asphalt, both of them yelping with fright. The Packard skidded to a stop across the trolley rails; I punched the glove-compartment lock, and got my hands on the short .38 S&W that was riding in there, and leaned out of the window to lay a bead on them, but they'd already scrambled to their feet and were scampering like rats in flight down the alley to Sierra Bonita Avenue. I might have caught them yet, but Khan was scratching the upholstery from the doors and howling for their blood. I put the car in gear and started rolling west again. Nobody thought to stop by and ask questions; this town has seen too many movies being shot.

The first sheriff's patrol I came across was at Laurel Canon, a shiny new black-and-white cruiser snuggled up behind a small coupe from which emerged peal after peal of giddy feminine hilarity. I pulled abreast and sat watching the crew, two husky young deputies in summer khaki showing off their build. Presently one turned, reluctantly, and glowered at me over his ticket clip.

"You want something, Mac?"

"If you gentlemen can possibly tear yourselves away," I said, "I'd kind of like to report a little something, such as a couple of fellows who tried to stick me up just now."

The house was dark when I ran up the driveway and rumbled into the garage.

I let myself in through the service porch and barked my shins on the rim of Khan's feed-pan. I pattered about in the kitchen and raided the icebox while Khan gobbled down a gallon of Red Heart. I checked my blotter in the den for messages, found none, and trudged upstairs.

The little woman had my pillow stacked on hers. She was reading a fashion magazine and reclining on top of the sheet. In a white lace jacket and pajama shorts. In the light of our headboard lamp the effect was about as refreshing as a frosted daiquiri and just as thoughtfully devised. The smile that came with it tickled the roots of my hair.

"Did you have fun?"

I hung up my coat and counted a hundred, by fives, and said carefully: "Not very much. In this heat, what it takes to have fun is to make like the Queen of Sheba waiting for the help to bring along another handsome Negro slave."

"That was Cleopatra, darling. It is hot, isn't it? Maybe you'd better take a shower. Are you going to show me the pretty blue mink before you come to bed?"

I grunted and explained why I wasn't about to show her the pretty blue mink before I came to bed.

SHE put the magazine aside and listened, patiently enough. She seemed genuinely chagrined. "Oh, Johnny, how perfectly awful! You mean whoever killed this Sergeant Bush just walked right in, and pulled a knife on him, and purposely cut his throat so he couldn't give them away? He'd been useful to them for months, the way you're telling it, and all they had against him was this record business. If that was it, they could have made him give it up. There wasn't any sense in killing him."

"They can always find another boy. You don't get the idea, cherry pie: at this stage of the game it was very important to them to keep the deal under wraps. Later on, when they're really organized, it won't matter so much, but right now they just couldn't afford a roust. The record itself they could've gone for with a blackjack, or by searching the apartment while he was away."

"And Bush would have turned them in," said Suzy wisely.

"I think he would. Not openly, of course, but in a manner where he wouldn't be involved. After all, he was a cop, and maybe he'd already reached the point where he didn't consider it worth his while to take any more chances with this mob. More likely he tried to hold them up for more than they had figured on, and used the record as a club. Either way, it was simply a question of protecting their identity."

She frowned at me, doubtfully. "How about those poor girls? They must know who's been pushing them around."

"Go on with you. All they know is some guy they call Danny or Freddy who phones them instructions every other day and who comes to collect maybe once a week. If you laid for him and caught him at it, he'd claim to be a stocking salesman or something, and all concerned would promptly parade into court and solemnly swear that he was a stocking salesman or something, sure enough, Judge, Your Honor. What the heck, you think these kids want to wind up like Bush, on a slab in the morgue?"

"But darling, if nobody will talk, then the police may never find out!"

I laughed at her and said: "Don't worry, chicken; they'll find out, all right. Dave Hogan probably knows already, or he'll know within a week or two. What happens then is anybody's guess. The point is there won't be a trial or anything stylish and neat, on account of the People of the State of California will be a little short on evidence."

"I suppose so," she disapproved uncertainly. "Johnny, whatever made that nasty Sergeant Matson think you were involved?"

"He's just a cop of the old school where it says if you come on the scene of the crime, and there's another fellow there ahead of you, you put the arm on him because he done it, period. Which must be why he's still a sergeant in the Vice Squad, after twenty years or so."

She smiled indulgently, but her eyes looked preoccupied. I was under the shower, obliging with a creditable baritone cadenza of "The Donkey Song" when she came hurrying into the bathroom and prodded at me through the curtain, nervously. "Johnny, listen! Stop that awful noise!"

"What's wrong with it? The acoustics in here are swell, and my low B-flat is smack on pitch, I'll have you know."

"Oh, pooh on your low B-flat. Please, darling, I'm serious. This man McElroy—do you realize he may have murdered Bush?"

"How about President Truman?" I yelled at her through the hissing spray. "Maybe he flew in from Washington last night and gave those Secret Service boys the slip."

She reached inside and turned the water off and threw a towel in with me. "John Marshall, if you won't quit behaving like a stupid goon, so help me, I'm going to check on this case myself. You told Dave you were snooping around that apartment house because you had a tip about the coat. You didn't tell him you were following someone. He'd have made you give him the name and the facts. Now if it should turn out that McElroy is guilty, they can take your license from you and arrest you for obstructing justice, can't you see?"

"Yeah, if— Look, pussy-cat, McElroy is no hood. You hear stories about how apparently quite respectable citizens lead a double life, and some of them are true, but those people would never have fooled any halfway experienced investigator who'd sat on their tail for a spell. McElroy was out of my sight for perhaps five minutes, ten at most, before I found Bush. That's without even counting the time for him to walk in there and out again, and get into his car and drive away. Then I happened to notice he smokes his cigars on the left, which means he's almost certainly lefthanded. And Bush was cut down by a stroke across the left side of his neck. He was a husky youngster, but the blow went slashing through his guard. A southpaw killer couldn't have delivered it, not with the awkward sort of backhand swipe he'd have had to employ."

SHE went back to bed, but she looked puzzled. "I don't want to hear any more," she said at last. "You're most probably right, but after all these years it still makes me feel a little sick when you get yourself mixed up in one of those things, and you start analyzing them as if they were deductions on your income tax."

"I'm not mixed up in this. Dave Hogan is."

"Then let him handle it. Are you still planning to hunt for the coat?"

"Why not? It's just a job."

"You'll find it at the store."

"That right? How would you know?"

"Darling, you just don't understand. If there's another girl, she'd never accept those furs until they had been cleaned, and the monogram changed to her own. Women are funny that way. McElroy might not have thought of that, either, but she'd put it up to him right quick."

"You've got a point. I'll check it first thing in the morning."

She sighed contentedly and dropped off to sleep almost in the same breath. It occurred to me then I'd forgotten

to mention a certain minor incident that had befallen me on my way home.

Chapter Seven



IN THE MORNING I WOKE UP AT EIGHT, BY THE headboard clock. The sun lay across the bed in a brassy ladder pattern. I sneaked out from between the sheets and carefully adjusted the Venetian blinds. The shower water ran lukewarm.

Downstairs I flipped switches and messed with the icebox, the toaster and the coffee-pot. The dog put his paws on my shoulder and yawned in my face. I pushed him out and hauled in the newspaper off the porch and settled with it and a breakfast tray in the den behind my desk.

The late Clifford A. Bush, of 1695 North Crescent Circle, stared at me from a small halftone cut on Page Two of the *Post-Courier*. It was the kind of picture that appears in high-school graduation sheets. He looked easily eighteen years old, with his wavy black hair plastered back, and he displayed a toothy grin, like a man just voted by his class most likely to marry the boss' daughter. The caption proclaimed with solid accuracy *Police Officer Found Dead*. What passed for a story under it ran all of seven lines and would have you believe that the Sheriff's Office had this little mishap tentatively listed as a suicide. There was no mention of the cause of death, of television screens with nothing back of them, or of one John C. Marshall who could be relied upon to keep a zippered lip.

For no good reason breakfast tasted fine.

At nine o'clock I phoned the Regent-Plaza.

Harry Rose was his usual chipper self. "Oh, no! Not you again!"

"Who's complaining?" I said. "Look, Harry, you remember mentioning a certain syndicate to me?"

That stopped him cold, for maybe half a second. "Sure, I remember," he said, and his lazy drawl was suddenly keen. "So what? You're not fussing around by yourself with that bunch of musketeers, I hope. Mamma see, Mamma spank."

"Just keeping up my files. You got an idea who they are?"

"Hang on, my pet," he instructed me. "As a matter of fact, and you may quote me there, I've got quite a few ideas. Am I making myself clear?"

"Fair enough," I said. "You don't know."

"That's a hell of a way of putting it, honey boy. Now, on the other hand, it happens we do pick up a little tidbit every once in a while. Last Monday, for instance, when I made this short-con grifter on his merits, coming through the lobby, and we grabbed him before he could set up a pitch. So it turned out he's more or less on the legit these days, and we punched the guff with him most of the afternoon."

"Do tell," I said. "A short-congee who tattles on the heavy racketers!"

"Oh, it wasn't so bad. Not any real, sure-enough tattling, just a cozy little chat among old friends, with a bottle of *vino* standing by on the chiffonier. Nobody mentioned any names, you understand, but our man claimed a rumble where it says the johns already have this deal sewed up, they're only holding back so they can make expenses. You know what that means, some wiseacre on Central Vice rang in a bug and hooked it up to a recorder. Now he's shaking the cherry tree while he reaches behind him for the axe."

"You interest me, pal," I said. "But not an awful lot. Say, Harry, what's the dope on 316 this morning? I kind of got sidetracked on him last night."



He came rocketing up, his arm chopping at me.

He made a gleefully derisive noise and ordered me back to the bottom of the class. Then he told me to wait, and I heard him muttering into his second phone. When he came back on, he sounded a little curious. "Hey, listen, you wouldn't be trying to pull anything, would you, Johnny?"

My hand on the receiver made a fist, but I managed to sniff at him somehow. "What's wrong?"

"Quit reading my lines. I'm supposed to ask you. The maid claims 316 was a sleep-out. His key's still in the box."

I swore under my breath. Perhaps there was no lady after all.

OUTSIDE, it was too hot already. Below, the city lay invisible, sweltering away under its blanket of murky, eye-searing smog. In the garage the dog Khan lay panting contentedly on the cool cement. When I opened the door of the car, he was up in a single bound and scrambling into the tonneau with a yelp of delight. I snarled at him, but it seemed like too much of an effort to kick him out.

I was out of the driveway and coasting down Broxton to Sunset when Hogan's dusty old sedan came growling up the hill in second gear. Its siren moaned at me, perfunctorily. I slid into the curb and walked across the street on rubber legs.

He watched me from behind the wheel, blankly expressionless. "Nice day."

"For rattlesnakes," I said. "If you want breakfast, you're a little late."

"Going some place?"

"Why, yes," I said. "Yes, Dave, I am. Okay with you?"

"What's the fuss?" he inquired. "I just asked was you going some place. We come by for a check on this stick-up beef of yours, last night. We caught it on the teletype at headquarters this morning."

Sergeant Ramon Garcia flashed his teeth at me from the co-pilot seat. "What's there to check?" I asked. "Those prowler-boy boys of yours got everything I have."

"You should of reported to us," said Hogan carelessly. "Since when do you guys fool around with that bush-league stuff?"

"We was hired to protect the taxpayers, same as any other cop. We got to check on your description of these hoodlums. You said the fatus had on cotton gloves, and his pal talked it up pretty fast, and he had a scarred left ear. That how it was?"

"Does it sound like I made it up?"

"We just wanna be sure. We got fifty-two thousand ex-cons in this country, on account of they like the climate here. You didn't see no gun?"

"No, but they had one, all right. Khan could smell it. That's why he got rough with them."

"Yeah, that big dog of yours is kind of smart," he admitted with faintly insulting emphasis. "We think we got a make on them. Greasy-thumb Steve Gusik, and Loudmouth Hymie Cohn."

"Well, fine," I said. "You line 'em up, and I'll identify 'em, and between us we'll file 'em away in Folsom for a year or two."

Hogan just looked at me, impassively. "Could be."

"What's wrong with it?"

"It don't add up so good. These hoods ain't local boys. They got vagged three-four months ago, downtown. That's when we put them on a bus, back to K.C."

I considered that. Kansas City and all points East supply this town with a large and steady quota of tourists who don't come to see the sights. About three out of five are pinched for vagrancy, not necessarily because they lack means of support. Nobody bothers to keep score on how many of them drift back when they're bounced across the fence.

Garcia said: "You got off pretty easy, kid. Those hombies used to be on Jack Modena's payroll until he was blasted by the Feds last year, down to Saint Joe."

"We just wondered," said Hogan. "We figured you might of had an angle, Johnny. Like maybe holding out on us."

I shook my head; sometimes the nonchalant denial carries better than a windy speech. We all stared at each other some more before Hogan shrugged it off. "Could be," he said again. "They might of needed transportation and a stake. If that's the deal, they'll try again today, and tomorrow some rookie'll spot 'em off the hot-sheet and pick 'em up."

"Sure, any time," I said vaguely. "What gives on this Bush killing, Dave, or should I ask?"

"We ain't made a sale yet."

"I thought maybe the neighbors might've noticed things."

"Nah, them dizzy dames," he grumbled contemptuously. "Mike Vickers jumped 'em through the hoop all night."

I pursed my lips at him and inquired: "What did Homicide make of that spot on his desk in the bedroom, Dave?"

"They figure he set up a typewriter there. He must of brought one from the office two-three days ago to do some work at home. We didn't see it when we was in yesterday to plant the bug. You interested or something?"

"Not particularly."

"Yeah, not particularly is right." He slapped his car in gear and kicked the gas. "Just keep your nose clean,

fella," he admonished me, and roared away uphill in a cloud of dark blue smoke from his leaky exhaust. . . .

Sascha of Beverly Hills was a medium-sized store-front off Schlepp Row, the curved visiglass window encased in a frame of black onyx laced with jade. The display consisted of a single mannequin, in crystal rock, with a tiny chinchilla pelt stretched flat between the hands.

The glass brick door swung wide for me at the touch of my hand on the knob, and offered access to three walls of solid mirror and a fourth of ceiling-high pink whipcord drapery. They gave me time to be impressed. When I got tired of that and started coughing for attention, the man split the drapes and stood before them, surveying me casually, as if he were hiring stablehands today. He had actually dressed for the part, in polo shirt and breeches and glossily polished brown leather riding boots with English spurs.

"You weesh som'ting?"

The accent delivered the authentic whipcrack ring, the genuine caviar-and-vodka flavor such as you'd have to expect from a fellow whose uncle had been taken care of in a cellar in Ekaterinenburg, back in '18.

I GRINNED at him, somewhat uncertainly, and said: "I'm looking for a nice mink coat, size twelve. My wife reminded me she has a birthday coming up."

His eyebrows arched out of alignment. The caviar came served on ice. "A grocery store these ees not, my dear sir."

"How's that again?"

"We do not sell over the counter. From furs we create the unique design. First the woman we must see—from her body, her soul, she must inspire us to create for her, you understand?"

"Now look, let's get this straight," I said. "I want something unusual in mink that my wife can show off to her friends."

"Unusual?" Now he was really provoked with me. "From copies we make nothing, do you understand? Always a Sascha fur, eet ees unusual. By us ees the exclusive style, only t'ing we create."

"Well, the color has something to do with it," I said reasonably.

The eyebrows relaxed; the stiffly frozen Slavic inflection became condescending. "From color ees little important, my dear sir. Ees many color, Breath of Spring, Royal Pastel, Aleutian Blue—ees prized by women only because they are scarce. Ees a matter of feeding and breeding the animals—much patience already, much vitamin shots. Long time make pretty skeens, you understand." He actually smiled upon me, loftily.

"This Aleutian Blue sounds good," I said. "You have a sample I could see?"

"Ees expensive," he told me, and shrugged, with his long, expressive hands palms up. "We design such a coat, not long ago. Very nice, very special creation, but the woman must be blonde for to wear these sapphires shade." He drew a sketch pad from his pocket and beckoned a finger at me in peremptory summons. The pencil flew over the pad, and in five seconds traced a rear view of the coat: wide cascade panels flaring out in spiral loops to form a ballerina skirt, an enormous *bouffante* collar tapering down to an hourglass waist. "From style ees exquisite," he praised himself and held the pad at arms' length better to admire his handiwork. The pencil followed it and loosely jotted figures under the design, making sure I could watch: \$24,000.00.

"Now there," I said jovially, "might be just what I'm looking for. If you could show it to me, or tell me where I could see one like it, we might do business, at that."

He nodded absent-mindedly, still preoccupied with the sketch. Then he gave me a startled doubletake. "You are interested?"

"Very much."

"Tomorrow you come back. We show you skeens."

"No good. I'd have to see the coat made up. Your customer won't mind. I couldn't tell from looking at a swath of pelts."

He twirled up the needle-sharp points of his grizzled mustache and fixed me with a speculative beady eye.

"You weesh to see these coat?"

"If it's convenient, yes."

"Pardon?"

"I said don't bother going to a lot of trouble. There must be other shops where I can buy a coat. It isn't a question of money."

He didn't like that; it was distinctly the wrong approach, I realized too late. "From t'ings like these we must have time," he told me, and the smile he served up was as phony as tinsel braid. "Your name and address, plizz. We inform you if can be arranged."

I gave him a card, the kind with just my name and a downtown phone where six discreet young ladies spend their time assuring everybody Mr. Blank has just stepped out and please sir, may we have him call you back.

"You are beezness man, maybe?"

"That's right."

"What beezness, plizz?"

"Don't see that it matters," I said. "If you must know, I've done all kinds of business. Right now it happens I'm in ladies' wear."

He curled his lip and drew a heavy pencil stroke across the figures on the pad. His smile had grown remote, about as far remote as Vladivostok. "Excuse us, plizz. We have engagement," he cold-shouldered me. "Ees possible we can arrange, we contact you." The draperies swallowed him up so fast that the effect was like a stage magician's disappearing act.

OUT on Schlepp Row the pavement burned my feet. Traffic moved languidly, and no pedestrians were in sight for several blocks. I headed north and bumped across the Pacific Electric tracks at Santa Dolores and made for the hills again. In the cañon it was almost cool, the way a boiler-room is cool.

Sixteen Sycamore Terrace looked just as austere secluded as the day before, and just as virginally correct. I shoved the Packard in under the same liveoak and strode up the oystershell path once more. Khan woke up and stuck his head out through the open rear-seat window, barking after me reproachfully. He was getting a little impatient with me and my fumbling around.

"Young man!"

The hidden voice supplied a quaver of old age, slightly modified by a tiny sandpaper rasp. I stopped dead in my tracks in sheer surprise—no one had called me a young man in fifteen years. The face that peered at me around one of the molded deodars from the neighbors' lawn had the skin of a dried brown apple, the nose like a woodpecker's beak and steel-rimmed glasses. It found shade below a huge and very dirty peaked straw hat, and it rested on a wrinkled pipestem neck supported in its turn by something less than eighty pounds of barely covered bones, draped in black moiré and a bright red-checked gingham pinafore.

"Young man, that dog of yours is properly secured, I trust."

I gave her my No. 12B, Respectful Smile, and said: "Don't worry, ma'am, he's the most good-natured lummoxy you ever saw."

"Indeed. If that is your version of a good-natured animal, I should not care to meet one which you considered otherwise. There's a law against barking dogs in Beverly Hills, I'll have you know."

I dropped my smile and went back to the car and turned the windows halfway up. Khan slumped to the

floor and gave me a doleful look. I scowled at him and marched up the driveway again without another word. The old girl in the red-checked pinafore leaned on her garden rake to watch me pass. "Good-natured!" she rasped behind my back.

The colored maid inspected me goggle-eyed through the front door's wicket grille. "Is Miz Leila expectin' yo', suh?"

"If she isn't," I said, "it will be just too bad."

She slammed the grille on me, more out of skittishness than anything. The clackety-click of her steps inside the house receded rapidly. I sat down on the porch balustrade and used the soggy remnants of my handkerchief to try and look a little less like a field hand after a day on the threshing machine.

WHEN she returned at last to let me in, she seemed more flustered yet and practically rushed me through the living-room, out by the French doors through the patio and down six flagstone steps toward the pool. It was only a little catchpenny sort of pool, but in that heat the production wasn't hard to take; the wet blue tiles, the greensward of the adjoining badminton court, the shady royal palm behind the diving board conspired in creating an illusion of comfort to tempt a Trappist monk. In the tempting department my elegant client delivered a healthy pitch. She lay flat on her tummy in one of those padded redwood lounging chairs. She wore a triangular strip of pale gold terry cloth, and nothing else I could identify. She turned the wisteria eyes on me as I approached, and tossed her yellow locks aside over one shapely ear, and obliged with a smile that would have boiled an egg. The little colored girl made her escape as if she had noticed my cloven hoof.

"Hello."

"Good morning to you, Miss De Jong," I sang, a trifle out of tune. "And how are you this fine sunny day? Don't answer that—we won't want to spoil the effect."

She quirked those lovely sulky lips for me. She wanted me to know I was amusing her. "Do sit down," said the cultured-hostess voice. "You must be terribly industrious. Here it's almost eleven o'clock, and I'm simply unable to stir myself."

The candy-striped director's chair standing by on the tiles felt slightly damp. The lady herself did not look much as if she'd been using the pool, and no wet towels seemed to be in evidence. I said: "Something's come up you'd better know about, Miss De Jong. It may be a bit of a shock."

She dropped the smile and glanced at me, vaguely disturbed. "Then he's gone back to Vivian? You're sure?"

"If you recall," I said, "that's the part I was not supposed to investigate."

"Oh, yes, my coat." There was no effort made to hide the disappointment now. "But don't you see, if he has given it to her, you'd have to tell me and I should know anyway."

"Maybe you would, at that," I said. "It's not much of a point, because he's done nothing of the kind."

"Oh. So you've found it."

"Yes ma'am, I've found your mink. I know exactly where it is. It has been there since early yesterday before you called me in. Your fiancé left his hotel after breakfast and took it right back to the shop."

"Did he really?" Her interest was no more than polite pretense; the inflection suggested that men were a pack of silly fools. "How awfully clever of you. I'll phone Sascha and tell him to deliver it sometime today, shall I?"

"You're quite welcome to try," I said. "It's barely possible His Imperial Highness may wish to accommodate you. However, I think he's accepted your fur piece

for storage, and if he returns it to you without permission from the original bailee, he lays himself wide open to a damage suit."

"But it's mine!" she protested languidly. "Why can't you go and get it back for me?"

I gave myself a cigarette and made a show of concentrating on what little ceremony was involved.

"There are two reasons, Miss De Jong: The first is simple—if the shop were to make trouble and call in the law, I would be forced to file a stolen-property complaint in your behalf. You'd win the war and lose the peace on newspaper publicity. The second reason is more simple yet. I'm very much afraid I'll have to give you back your money and pull out."

She didn't twitch a lash. "May I ask why?"

"Yes ma'am, you may, and I owe you an honest reply. There are serious grounds for believing that Mr. McElroy is mixed up in a murder case."

The pool gave up a gurgling little noise from its filter inlet valve. A bee buzzed my nose, got a whiff of my cigarette smoke and droned away. The woman in the redwood lounging chair lay motionless, her warm brown skin transmitting a musky aroma of high-priced suntan oil.

"If that's a joke," she told me coolly, "it's in frightfully bad taste."

"It would be, if it were. I think you realize it isn't, Miss De Jong."

"I'm not entirely sure I understand. Are you suggesting that my fiancé has killed someone?"

"Suggestions are out of my line," I said impatiently. "If it's the facts you want, here they are. Someone was killed last night, but dead. Your fiancé was there."

SHE got up off her stomach in one slow, graceful movement and sat down to face me squarely, crossing her long slim legs at the ankles and resting her chin on coral-polished finger tips. She'd been wearing a bra after all, the kind that comes in two separate strapless cups fixed with adhesive tape. The wisteria eyes were level and composed. "It doesn't sound like Keith at all. Surely detectives make mistakes, the same as everybody else?"

"They do, indeed," I said. "But I didn't this time, Miss De Jong, or anyway, not in a sense of confusing identities. There's no question about that part—I checked and double-checked; I even checked his car. I had Mr. McElroy under surveillance for the best part of the evening, hoping he'd lead me to your mink. At that time I knew only it wasn't in his hotel room any more. But he looked like a man with trouble on his mind. I followed him to Santa Monica around nine-thirty, where he looked at the Pacific for a while and made a phone call from a filling station. Did he call you?"

She shook her head. "I tried to reach him once or twice myself last night," she told me distantly.

"That makes it worse, because his call seems to fit in with what came afterward. He drove back into town to the Chateau Bayard. Frankly, I thought he'd been dating a woman there. I gave him too much rope, and he slipped out again by the back exit while I pumped the night reception clerk. There were no more than six apartments which he might have visited. In one of them a man had just stopped living."

The strawberry-luscious lips made a *moué* of disdain. "Is that all? If you don't mind, it sounds like a simple coincidence, really."

"It did to me. It doesn't any more."

"Why, please? Keith may act rather strange sometimes, but he is definitely not the type that goes off killing people."

"There's no such thing as not the type," I said. "Three-year-old children have been known to kill; it all

depends on the amount of provocation. However, I think you are probably right, Miss De Jong, at least in that respect. I don't believe myself he did the job. But he's mixed up in it, all right—too many indications point that way. For example, the fact he put your mink in storage yesterday makes it unlikely that he came to see another girl."

"He wouldn't have anyway, you know." She was politely scornful with me now. "Keith isn't exactly a ladies' man. He's been rather devoted to me in his own peculiar way, and there's scarcely been time for him to form other attachments, don't you see."

"He was in Mexico last week," I said.

"Just a few hours. It wasn't actually necessary, but he wanted to attend the hearing and make sure. He flew both ways."

"Well, if that's how it is," I said, "perhaps you'll agree he could have had no special reason for not coming back to his hotel last night."

For the first time she seemed upset; she allowed me a start of surprise and a frown as incredulous as if I'd offered her a trick cigar. "Are you trying to tell me Keith has disappeared?"

"Yes ma'am, I am. He has."

"If you'll forgive me, that's hard to believe."

"I just nodded and let it go at that. She was up to her old routine of torturing those exquisite lips between her teeth."

"Have you told the police?"

"Not yet. We'll have to, though, and right away. Now that you know about this, Miss De Jong, they can hang an accessory rap on both of us if we keep quiet. I'm afraid Mr. McElroy has made a serious mistake in trying to cover his tracks, even if he is not directly implicated. They've probably already traced this call he made from Santa Monica. It would have crossed a toll zone, which means there's a record of it."

HER close-to-patrician features were a study in vexed indecision. I almost felt sorry for her; it was admittedly the very devil of a thing, to a woman who had already gone in for fairly desperate measures attempting to save her face and reclaim her somewhat doubtful Romeo.

"But you're a detective yourself," she said slowly. "Suppose I should hire you to find him for me? After all, you can't be certain he's involved—you've no proof of it, only suspicions. He may have had some other reason for not going back to his hotel, some other trouble altogether. There's always Vivian, you know; she is quite capable of doing something to embarrass him."

"Such as killing somebody and signing his name? I don't buy that," I said. "You must've been looking at television mysteries, ma'am."

The wisteria eyes raked me with sudden arrogant resolve. "If it's a question of money, I'll give you a thousand dollars to find Keith and prove he's not guilty of any crime. Considering your own admission that you lost him when you shouldn't have, it seems to me you can hardly afford to refuse."

I smiled at her, not too confidently. A thousand dollars isn't petty cash, not even in Hollywood, where everything comes big, including heads and ulcers, but it fell a little short of compensating for the risk of losing both my license and my liberty. *Just keep your nose clean, fella...* Then again there remained this peculiar notion I had about the deal that I couldn't seem to shake.

"Is Mr. McElroy lefthanded, ma'am?"

She stared at me, blankly. "I haven't the faintest idea."

"Don't you? You must have known him for some time, and pretty well."

"Really!" The way she tossed her locks back into discipline struck off an angry yellow glint. "If it matters, I've known my fiancé three months. It just so hap-

pens that I've never noticed which—what you were asking me about." She didn't actually blush, but the duchess polish had been scratched.

I grinned and said: "That's all right, Miss De Jong—my mother told me love is blind. If you insist, I'll try to find him for you, and if he is in the clear, I'll do my best to keep the flies away. But I'm warning you now, I'll have to turn him over to the cops, in case. . . . Do you know anything about his business affairs?"

"He's quite successful, I believe. Mr. Fernandez, his attorney, can probably give you details. It has never occurred to me to pry."

I rose and grinned some more, sort of helplessly. The sun caught the back of my neck and started me sweating again. "Sure you can't make a guess at where he might have gone?" I asked her carefully.

"If I could, do you really suppose I should have you find out?"

That seemed to settle it, so far as she was concerned.

Chapter Eight



THE McELROY HOME ON COUNTRY CLUB DRIVE turned out to be one of those car barn-size old Colonial clapboard drums. It could have used a coat of paint, but the grounds had been groomed like a park, with formal terraced lawns and oval flower beds in primly disciplined bloom.

Inside, it was fairly cool and dark. The hall had space enough for a lot of knotty pine, a realistically stuffed moose at the foot of the hunting-lodge stairs and a fat old Chinaman in houseboy uniform, who listened blandly to my casual request to see the boss, and padded away without comment into the shadows of the double corridor.

I was rubbing the moose's hairy flank when from behind the stairs a voice addressed me in a shrill, excited whisper.

"Stick 'em up!"

The shiny nickel barrel of a gun emerged around the banister and stared at me. I blinked and almost made a dive for it, it looked so much like the genuine article in that light. Then the second gun appeared, and two more on the opposite side of the stairs, and another voice piped up, nearly cracking itself with the effort to lower its inflection from a childish treble to a groggy bass.

"Awright, stranger, reach for the sky, or we'll fill ya full of lead."

I reached obediently, and Höpalong Cassidy advanced on me in duplicate, two pair of pinto chaps, two cowboy shirts, two coal-black Stetsons and two grim young frowns of stern determination to see justice done.

"You fellows got me wrong," I protested cunningly. "I'm a Texas Ranger in disguise, understand, and my orders are to help you catch those rustlers you've been looking for."

"This the guy you saw sellin' them rifles to the Injuns, Cactus Joe?" one of them shrilled.

"Yep, that's him. Watch out for him, Hoppy, he's a mighty tricky *hombre*," warned his partner solemnly, and poked both of his .45 cap pistols into my ribs.

"Do we let him have it now?"

"Naw, we got to take him to jail. He's supposed to be tried by some silly old judge before we can string him up," said Cactus Joe, disgustedly.

I did my best to make a properly dejected face. A woman came down the stairs in no special hurry and said: "Keith! Jackie! Stop annoying the gentleman!" She did not sound excessively perturbed, and the accent on gentleman had a slightly specious ring. They minded her quickly enough; the stage from Carson City was already

overdue, and they rode whooping off to the rescue, down the corridor.

"You've come to see my husband? He's not here."

She was ready to slip me the brush-off, but a tiny note of curiosity seemed to be lingering somewhere. It might have escaped me in different circumstances, for she'd hardly qualify as a lady of moods and subtleties. I was fairly amused with the contrast she supplied when compared to my glamorous client, though in her own way she was not unattractive: tall and lean, small-breasted, frankly fortysix, a sloop-eyed, raven-haired brunette in streamlined flannel slacks and frilly nylon blouse. She was certainly not the type to put up with any nonsense, or to accept another woman's furs by way of a reconciliation gift.

"Sorry to bother you, Mrs. McElroy," I said. "But the matter is urgent, and if he were at home, I'm absolutely sure he'd want to see me right away. Could you possibly get a message to him while I wait?"

"My husband does not live here any more."

It was a statement for my information, since I'd pressed the point. No satisfaction, no regret or anything. I nodded, just as noncommittally, and said: "Yes ma'am, I know. I've been trying all morning to reach him at his hotel, but they tell me he hasn't been in since yesterday. I was hoping that you might be able to put me in touch with him."

She studied both me and my card, coldly and still without apparent interest. "Are you a business associate of his, Mr. Marshall?"

"Not exactly," I said. "There's a question of insurance involved."

Well, there was, after all, a question of insurance involved. It wasn't a specially smart or effective approach, but it happened to hit the gong, where she was concerned. She thawed out in a hurry and she actually risked her make-up in a cagey smile.

"Oh, you're from the insurance company."

She'd been around long enough to know there are more than six hundred insurance companies in the United States, so I let it go at that. We were already in the sunporch den—more knotty pine, New England maple and a Bechstein Concert Grand. "Won't you sit down? I've intended to come down myself to your office, with my lawyer. Your letter only came day before yesterday."

"Maybe it was delayed," I offered lamely.

"It doesn't matter. Of course you realize I won't consent."

I SAID I WAS SORRY to hear it, which seemed like the proper conventional reply, but did not get me anywhere. She gave me a stare as if I were being perfectly absurd.

"Why should you people care? Would you consent to such a thing, if you were in my shoes?"

"Probably not," I said. "Perhaps we are not in the picture quite as clearly as we ought to be."

"Well, really, I don't see why it shouldn't be clear," she declared impatiently. "I've always paid the premiums, and I shall certainly continue paying them. You must admit I'd be a sucker to agree to change the beneficiary and lose a quarter million dollars, after what has happened, and the way my husband treated me."

I managed to conquer a sigh of relief and supplied her with my brightest grin of sympathy. The ground was firm under my feet once more. Some life insurance outfit had McElroy on the books for a \$250,000 policy. He'd been paying the premiums through his wife, to duck the income tax, and now he was stuck with the deal—he couldn't force her to give up her rights as beneficiary.

"Just how has he treated you, Mrs. McElroy?" I asked her benevolently.

She rested her hands on the Bechstein's keyboard, striking an idle dissonant. "I suppose he's been feeding you people the same pack of lies he told to all our friends.

I'll have you know I never did agree to a divorce, and I'm not going to. If he should go ahead and marry that snooty blonde hussy, I'll sue him for a legal separation here in California and prosecute him on a charge of bigamy."

"Yes, ma'am," I said. "But Mexican divorces can't be had as easy as all that. Not any more, that is. If you hadn't been served with the papers in time to enter an appearance, he couldn't have got his decree."

"Well, I've never been served," she assured me bitterly. "They tricked me into giving them a waiver, he and that slippery Mexican shyster of his. I don't read Spanish; and last month, before I even knew what they were up to, they brought in some documents for me to sign. They said it was something about an oil lease in Chihuahua they were putting in my name. My lawyer tells me it's a plain and simple case of fraud, and he's going to file a complaint with the Bar Association against that crook Fernandez. He says they're not going to get away with it."

JUDICIOUSLY I pursed my lips at her. Her story was easy enough to believe, but it wouldn't be easy to prove. It would be her word against theirs, and against her own signature. Her counsel must be well aware of this, but lawyers can't make a living by discouraging the trade.

"Is your husband an oil man, Mrs. McElroy?" I asked. "Oh, he plays around with oil, the way he plays with practically anything," she scoffed. "A promoter, he calls himself, as you probably know. I don't think he's done an honest day's work in years. He was just a small-time wholesale jobber when I married him. He made his pile during the war, on the black market if you want me to be frank with you. He's a crafty, vicious, boorish, emotionally unstable, no-good so-and-so, and I'd have left him long ago if it weren't for the children. That woman can play around with him as much as she likes, but he'll never be able to make a respectable woman out of her, and I'm going to fix it where she'll never touch a penny of his money—is that clear?"

"Sounds fair enough," I said, "—if you can do it. Of course the insurance company is not concerned with that. The matter of a change of beneficiary is up to you. Incidentally, maybe you'd like to help us out on a small detail. At the time of the application, our examining physician overlooked somehow to check if Mr. McElroy is normally lefthanded. It's only a minor statistical point, but we need the answer to complete our files."

"Yes, he's lefthanded," she admitted readily. "And don't think for a moment I'd let you cancel this policy now because you failed to complete your medical examination years ago. I'll fight you people tooth and nail if you try to get funny with me. I've got my children to consider, since their father can't be bothered any more. What do you want him for in such a hurry, anyway?"

"You haven't been in touch with him since yesterday?" "Certainly not." She was so indignantly sure of herself I couldn't help believing her. "I haven't heard from him since he walked out of here four weeks ago. You'd better try that fancy lady friend of his. I suppose you do have her address—she's made no secret of their goings-on. He's probably living there with her right now."

Mrs. Vivian McElroy leaned on the piano for another dissonant and blankly watched me bow myself out of there.

Outside, the afternoon was still ablaze, the air like corrosive fumes rising up from a bed of cinders, but the distant hills to the Northeast were charged with low-packed clouds. I drove into a filling station and messed with the Central Section phone directory while the man checked my tires. Fernandez, J., atty., was listed at a downtown address. The parking-lot attendant had his slicker laid out on the bench beside the office shack.



"You should have left that knife with McElroy's body."

"Some dog you got there, Mister. Gonna leave him here?"

"He'll be all right, if you don't bother him."

"Mister, I ain't Frank Buck. You better park this heap yourself. How long you gonna be?"

"Maybe an hour or so."

"You wanta roll your windows up."

The address on Spring turned out to be thirteen stories of black plastic tile and glazed concrete. The lobby's tenants' index listed J. Fernandez in 822. I rode up in an elevator full of chattering stenographers and office boys, squeezed out on eight, walked half a mile of air-conditioned corridors and confronted a panel of pebbled glass with gilt-edged lettering: *Dr. Jorge M. R. Fernandez, L.L.D., Consultant for Latin-American Affairs.*

Behind the impressive inscription was a small square anteroom equipped with one typewriter desk, two filing cabinets, three hardwood chairs and four back copies of the *Reader's Digest* on a rattan taboret. The desk was closed and bare, and did not even boast a telephone; the furniture looked like the kind that may be rented from the building super with a ten-dollar deposit. I raised my eyebrows at it, and the second door marked *Private* opened up and there he was, raising his eyebrows at me.

They were expressing casual disinterest just now. Maybe I didn't look the type that would want to consult him on Latin-American Affairs. Maybe his lunch had disagreed with him. He was built like a football star, pale-skinned, Greek statue-handsome, smoothly barbered and mustached. His city clothes of cool blue gabardine had been cut and fitted and pressed by expert hands. There was something peculiarly raffish about such a man pitching camp in those shabby surroundings.

"What can I do for you?"

His speech was brisk, incisive, lacking any foreign trace, a well-trained Eastern-college voice. I offered him my card, the one that said I was a Claims Adjuster, and he allowed it a cursory glance without accepting it. "Fraid I can't see you now, if you want information of some kind. Drop in tomorrow afternoon, around this time."

"If you like," I said. "But I'm trying to keep the name of a client of yours out of the newspapers, Counselor, and tomorrow might be too late."

The silky eyebrows curved. "Whose name?"

I dug up a pencil and wrote on the card where he could see. He promptly nudged the *Private* door shut with his back and hooked a leg across one corner of the desk.

"Sit down, my friend," he told me cheerfully. "I suppose it's about the mink. So the lady has called on the insurance company, has she? Can't say I'm surprised."

"Then you've already heard," I said.

"Of course. The old reprobate called me out of bed, night before last, to ask me where he stood. I told him he was being silly and advised him to return the coat to her. A gift's a gift—one of the fundamental principles of law, you know. Might be different if he could prove in court he'd made it in contemplation of marriage and she had refused to go through with the ceremony, but the way he put it, he's the one who's anxious to back out."

I scratched my chin and asked: "Why all the ruckus, Counselor?"

"Miss De Jong didn't tell you?" He pulled up the trouser pleat on his free-swinging leg and frowned at me. "I don't suppose she would. As a matter of fact, it was a question of insurance they were arguing about, or so I was informed. Mac's side of it seems to be that he'd promised the girl he was going to buy her a pretty substantial policy at Western Life, for her protection once they'd made the plunge, and she kept nagging him about it. Last Wednesday night he suddenly decided he was making a mistake."

"He must be the impulsive kind," I said.

"Not particularly. A man his age—" He shrugged and produced a smile of devastating brilliance. "Alter all, he was probably right, you know. She's quite a dish, you must've noticed, and there's twenty years between the two of them. It was one of those things, my friend—I warned him to go easy when I introduced them at the preview of Hal Sturgeon's picture, two-three months ago; but she had him proposing to her when he took her home from Ciro's that same night."

"A guy like him would need insurance," I suggested artlessly.

"Oh, by all means. Of course he's already been carrying quite a piece, but the man has a family to support. His ex-wife is a wonderful person, generous and understanding to a fault, but it goes without saying that she must protect the children's interests. Frankly, I told him he's a fool not to go back to her."

The temptation to laugh in his face came to me and was firmly suppressed. "That leaves the mink," I said. "I'm still going to have to talk with him."

He nodded and smiled; he couldn't agree with me more. "Be glad to set it up for you, although I rather think you'll be wasting your time. The old rascal was on my phone right after lunch today. Said he'd made up his mind to dispose of the coat. He claimed he'd fixed things where the lady was concerned so that she'd be in no position to make trouble."

This time it was hard to keep the leash on my surprise.

"You mean Mr. McElroy phoned this afternoon? Where did he call from, Counselor?"

"Does it matter?" The eloquent eyebrows were off on another curve. "His office, I presume—the Cotton Exchange Building, right across the street."

A vicious bright white flash stabbed through the anteroom and was instantly followed by a thunderclap that seemed to shake the floor. Rain hit the window with a hissing, tearing sound, as if sprayed from a high-pressure hose. I got up on my feet reluctantly. "Thanks for the information, Counselor," I said. "By the way, may one ask how long you've represented him?"

He said: "If it makes any difference to you, my friend, I haven't known old Mac for very long. Just handled the divorce for him."

"There's a rumor afloat that he may be involved in the rackets," I said.

"It's possible." This time his eyebrows didn't even twitch. "I doubt it, but I've been surprised before. Off-

hand, my guess is that your source goes back to '43 or thereabouts, when they indicted him on gambling charges up in Bakersfield, I think. That was before my time, of course. On the whole, I'd say old Mac keeps his business pretty much to himself."

He let his leg slip off the desk and offered me a big strong glossily manicured hand in farewell. At the door I turned back, half-heartedly, and asked him: "Any other gals you know of that he might be interested in?"

"No, no. No, no, no, positively not! You can dismiss that possibility, my friend. Old Mac may have his faults, but he is certainly no Don Juan—I think," he wound up.

Chapter Nine



THE COTTON EXCHANGE BUILDING BOASTED A tunnel approach under Spring which landed me into its bronze and green-tiled lobby on dry feet. The lobby reposed in suspended animation of the kind that seems to overtake most business establishments some half-hour before their week-end exodus. The newsstand had a single customer, a broad-beamed citizen huddled away behind the collar of his apparently new but already heavily rain-spattered trench coat.

The tenants' alphabetic index board failed to show any listing under *Mc* or *Mac*.

I scowled at it and braced the starter, who was leaning on the wall beside the board. "McElroy? Six-fifteen."

"New tenant of yours?"

He shook his tired gray head and pointed at the A. It listed *Acme Enterprises*, 615. "Been here ten years," he informed me indifferently.

"Know if he's up there now?"

"Mister, we get a lot of people going in and out."

The freckle-faced kid who was lounging against the controls of the nearest waiting elevator winked at me and said: "Nah, Six-fifteen ain't showed since Wednesday afternoon. His secretary's there, if ya wanna go up."

I nodded and got into his car, and the starter wearily waved him off. He shot me up to Six and paused with one hand on the door release. "You guys took long enough."

"Oh, did we?" I asked. "What makes you say that?"

He almost tripped over his adenoids, and was that anxious to prove himself a wisey. "Aw, now, Mister, ya kidding? I was there Wednesday when it happened. I seen it all." He flipped the switch and jerked a thumb: the empty hall of numbered doors, the door marked *Gentlemen* confronted us. "They was just coming out of there, is how it was. I'd brought up a couple of dames, and the guy says down, so I hold it, and then he says, 'You better think it over, Mr. McElroy, but fast,' and Six-fifteen says, 'Yeah, I will, like this, ya dirty so-and-so,' and he hauls off, and pops him one, smack in the kisser, see! So the guy kind of staggers on back into my car and drops his portable he's carrying, and gives me a glom of the roscoe he packs on his belt. That's when I figure he's a cop, but of course I'm already pouring on the juice, and the guy picks up his portable, gets off on One, and never says a word. So I figure you guys'll be back pretty soon."

"You fascinate me, son," I told him truthfully. "What makes you think I'm from Headquarters?"

He appraised me behind another wink. "Ya coulda fooled me if ya was alone," he grudgingly allowed. "That's just how come I didn't make the guy last Wednesday, not at first. It's when you and your partner come gumshoeing into the lobby together, is when I can spot you guys a mile away, is how it was."

"Me and my partner, eh?" I said reflectively.

"Yeah, sure, the fatso in the yellow coat," he sneered.

"He's waiting for ya at the news-stand now. He'd of come up with you if we'd of told ya Six-fifteen was in. Think I don't know how you guys work?"

I pursed my lips at him and almost had him take me down again. But the electric clock above the men's room door said ten to five, and I'd been sidetracked on this deal before. The news-stand customer would keep, if there was anything to him, but *Acme Enterprises* would be likely to close up for the weekend pretty soon.

"Watch ya step with the dame," said the kid to the back of my neck. "She likes the boss."

The blonde young lady who presided at the crescent-shaped reception desk of smoothly polished cherrywood did not at first glance seem to merit such disparagement. She impressed me as having been hired to match the room, a chastely hygienic decoration job in Koroseal and plastics and fluorescent lights. The young lady had short-cropped taffy hair, a fuzzy-peach complexion, tiny little ears, a pug nose and a pointed chin that appeared to be specially built for tilting defiantly. She looked every bit of twenty-one years old, but was probably twenty-five. She wore a light blue linen suit, a plain white nylon blouse and a small gold lapel watch for her only jewelry. The heavy oblong bronze plaque on the desk identified her as Bettina Howe.

"Do you have an appointment, please?"

She sounded as sure of herself as a nestling canary with a hungry tomcat sitting on its cage. I gave her my No. 9C, Paternal Sympathy, and shook my head. She shot another furtive peek at me and at my card, one of the kind with just my name engraved.

"What is it you wanted to see him about, Mr. Marshall?"

"If I tell you, Miss Howe, will you let me see him right away?"

"Oh, I'm sorry, he's awfully busy. He never sees anyone without a previous appointment," she informed me breathlessly. "Perhaps if you'd write us a letter and explain your business, he can take care of you sometime next week."

I bared a tooth at her and said: "If Sergeant Bush wrote you a letter too, it must've been a pip."

The windows rattled with another thunderclap. The girl in the blue linen suit almost fell over backward. She caught herself in the nick of time but her little face was suddenly the color of her blouse. "I'm awfully sorry. The noise upsets me, I'm afraid. Is there anything else I can do, Mr. Marshall, please?"

"You can quit putting on an act, Miss Howe."



"I almost did, then I remembered I might need it still."

"I'm afraid I don't quite understand."
"Go on with you!" I told her cozily. "You understand, all right. We aren't fooling each other a minute, we're not. When I walked in, you saw that I wouldn't be much of a mark for the brushoff routine they taught you in business college, a couple of years ago. I'm pretty sure the boss is out, but you probably know where he can be reached. So go ahead and reach him for me, honey—there's your telephone, right there. Either I see him, or he'll be the one who gets upset."

She was cringing from me by now.

"You're a d-detective," she accused me tearfully.

I almost told her flattery would get her nowhere. "How about it? Gonna use that phone?"

She shook her head determinedly. She tilted her chin at my face as if I'd been trying to pick her up in church.

"Now look, Miss Howe, let's get this straight," I offered patiently: "Your boss may have nothing to worry about or he may be a dangerous crook. If he's all right, you'll agree it can't hurt him to answer a couple of questions. If he isn't, a nice girl like you wouldn't want to cover up for him."

THE storm outside supplied us with more livid fireworks and more crashing sound effects. Mr. Keith McElroy's secretary started crying, stubbornly disconsolate. I threw up my hands in disgust and strode across the room toward the corner door, and she bolted her desk in a flash to bar my way.

"You c-can't go in—"

The tears were streaming now, and she pounded away at my chest with both her little fists. I swung her around by the shoulders and marched her ahead of me, lockstep-fashion, through the door just in case.

The private office was unoccupied. Rain clattered on the picture window covering one wall and made it dark in there. My sleeve brushed a switch in the archway and flooded the room with light from a small crystal chandelier. I saw a large antique Italian desk, the oval style; three huge black leather chairs grouped around a smoking-table of carved ebony; a modern cocktail bar and matching couch in plain bleached jacquard lined with gold. Rembrandt's *Lesson in Surgery* hung above the couch, a full-size copy in glittering oils, just the thing for a man with a yen for fancy cutlery.

On the desk was a leatherbound blotter, the usual onyx bric-a-brac and nothing else. The big calfskin executive chair behind it had been wheeled around. It looked newly abandoned, say for a stroll to the men's room down the hall. I let go of the girl and went over to feel its seat. It was cold, but my hand brushed a number of crisp loose particles. I picked up two and dropped them on the blotter—they were breadcrumbs, fairly stale.

"So he had breakfast here," I said.

Miss Bettina Howe had dried her tears and was smoothing her blue (career-girl's) tailor-made where my grip had wrinkled it. Her eyes were hating me.

"I don't know what you mean," she said tightly. "I really don't."

"But you knew what I meant about Sergeant Bush."

She consulted her watch with a show of deliberate ceremony. "If you'll excuse me now, please. We close at five, and I have an appointment at the beauty shop."

"You're going to stay until I'm through with you."

"Does that mean I am under arrest?" she demanded.

"If you insist, Miss Howe, we'll take a trip down to the Hall of Justice. They can do you an excellent finger wave at the County Jail. Or you could tell me here, about the business your boss was supposed to think over, last Wednesday afternoon."

"I haven't the faintest idea what you're talking about," she declared. She sat down on the couch and primly stretched her skirt around her shapely legs.

For a moment I almost called her silly bluff. A private license doesn't let you make arrests, not even in Hollywood, but there's no law that says you've got to disillusion people when they take you for a cop, and they're all set to come to Headquarters with you without a bar-room fight. I've arrested a score of crooks that way. But it just didn't make sense to put the arm on Miss Bettina Howe. I'd been hired to track down her boss and find out if he might be a killer and a racketeer, or no worse than a victim of coincidence who'd lost his nerve.

To pinch his secretary would have been the same as throwing in the cards. I smiled upon her reassuringly, and scribbled my telephone number on my card, and dropped it in her lap. I said I was sorry and told her to relax, she was to call me when the boss could talk to me.

I tried the most likely of two doors which appeared to afford an exit to the hall. Instead it presented a view of a small private bath: shower and lavatory in bright yellow tile, with the electric razor cord still dangling from its plug. On the lid of the hamper an oversize shocking-pink towel had been flung aside. It still felt slightly damp as my hand scooped it up, and it hooked on a corner of the lid, which opened with a crash. Inside the hamper, hastily dropped on a wad of dirty laundry, sat a square black leather box, with the grip and the hinges and lock of a somewhat old-fashioned portable typing machine. I fished it out and put it on the cover of the toilet bowl; it was heavier than it should be, and one flank of the box displayed a round black metal screen.

The girl came in and stood staring at me some more, very pale and erect and as tense as a violin string.

"Can you show me a search warrant, please?" she inquired, a catch of despair in her coldly formal tone.

"Don't bother me, honey," I said. "Not when I'm just about to set the world on fire."

"That's only our office dictaphone," she told me scornfully. "It doesn't work, and I put it aside for the repairman to come by."

I snapped the lock, and uncovered a series of switches, a roll of extension cord, a small pedestal microphone and two flat aluminum spools, the size of home projector movie reels. On the spools and between them ran some fifty feet of shiny metal tape. This was no dictaphone, though it could have been used for one. I recognized it for a sound recorder of the high-fidelity magnetic type preferred by musicians or radio artists to check on their work. The notion that Bush might have owned such a gadget in addition to the one that had been built into his Magnavox had not occurred to me before.

At that instant I wouldn't have bought McElroy's chances to escape the death house for two cents.

I GRABBED the electric razor extension and plugged it into the machine. I'd never operated one before; in the Army we'd used the kind that records on wire, which is simpler but mostly less accurate for quality of tone. Of course both types are basically similar—they will either record or play back or erase. You flip the playback switch, and the tape or the wire rolls through a pickup gimmick like a phonograph's.

The tubes of the amplifier gave a cheery hum and the tape started up with a jerk. Miss Bettina Howe came suddenly to life. I blocked her first wild kick, and then the second one aimed at my shins, and rode her away from the box, out of range.

"You've no right! You can't do this to him! It's all a terrible mistake—"

The recorder coughed and announced in a clear, affected, stogy baritone:

*She speaks,
O, speak again, bright angel! for thou art
As glorious to this night, being o'er my head,
As is a winged messenger of heaven. . . .*

I flicked back the switch at that point and started laughing fit to kill.

Chapter Ten



DIFFERENT ELEVATOR, JAMMED WITH WEEKEND-hungry wage slaves, picked me up and took me down. The colored boy at the controls didn't give my square black leather box a second glance.

The lobby was crowded as well, but the man in the trench coat seemed nowhere in sight. I dismissed him for one of the freckle-faced wise-guy's delusions and elbowed my way through the revolving doors into the street. It was still raining.

I dumped the recorder in the Packard's trunk and parked in a loading zone on Spring, within sight of the Cotton Exchange building's public and service courts.

The girl showed almost right away, less than a minute after I was ready for her. She had on one of those light plastic capes that roll up in your cigarette case, and she carried a dainty little umbrella of Chinese red oiled silk. A Glendale trolley bus waded the curb, and she ran to board it.

I fired up a cigarette and gave the bus two blocks before pulling out after it. This was almost too easy—even in that drenching rain I could have spotted her a mile. The bus and my car squeezed through traffic to Broadway and Sunset, turned west on the boulevard. At Figueroa we both missed the light by a hair, and Khan scrambled up on the rear seat and slapped my ears with his stiff yellow tail. I turned around and slapped him back, and noticed a Ford sedan with New York license plates that had apparently been blocked by my stopping behind the bus.

At Beaudry, ten blocks on down, it was still hanging back. I frowned at my mirror and slowed to a crawl. Traffic flowed past me, indignantly honking; the trolley bus gained a few blocks on me. The Ford seemed to hesitate briefly, then suddenly swept by and turned north at Elysian Park. Through its rain-blurred windows I caught a quick glimpse of two men, in coats and hats. The dog gave a cursory growl and jumped across into the front seat beside me, narrowly watching them disappear.

The bus was still clearly in sight and approaching the Glendale Turnpike intersection. I speeded up after it, checked on the mirror and saw the Ford, which was coyly poking its nose around Elysian Park and rejoining our little procession. I mentioned a couple of words my mother never taught me, and swung off the boulevard into a filling-station lot. The Ford breezed past again, turned north again. This time Khan snarled as if he meant business, and I got a good look at the one behind the wheel. He was fat, wore a trench coat and gloves and the stolidly dumpy profile of one of the heisters who had muscled into my car the night before. That would be Greasy-thumb Steve Gusik, if you could believe the cops.

I sighed, and switched gears, and took off after them. There was nothing I needed less, but no one expects you to do a job of work with a couple of hoods on your tail.

They were touring around the block to get behind me when they saw me coming, and they promptly started pouring on the coal. We plunged back down into the busy traffic of the boulevard on screaming tires, going fifty already with barely fifteen yards between us, and proceeded west on Sunset once again, here chasing hounds. By then the Glendale bus was out of sight, 'way down the turnpike, and I had my hands full trying to keep up with them. For a few intersections we still had

the lights playing ball, but after that it seemed only a question of who would crack up first.

Oddly enough, it's the self-preservation instinct of the other drivers on the road that causes you most of your grief in such a case. They see the pitch and they obligingly start scurrying. This creates elbow room for real traveling, which is bad medicine in those conditions. The Ford found out about that almost right away. It broke into the clear on a hastily abandoned traffic lane, pushed up to seventy—and met a florist's van which emerged from a side street, following the lights. Steve Gusik locked his brakes and skidded broadside for a hundred feet or so; he caromed off the van's left flank with a noise like cannon shot, got his wheels straightened out of the skid and zoomed ahead. The van stopped dead, and I almost ran into it myself. But a couple of taxicabs in the adjoining lane made room for me, so I managed to slither around its bumpers and speed through the gap, just in time to observe the Ford scoot off the boulevard and race uphill on Milton Way.

I scraped a hubcap on the asphalt turning with it, but the Packard hit the deck on all four shoes and came roaring away in pursuit. The hill was steep enough to call for second gear, and simple engine power came to count. I was gaining on them, not fast but steadily; at the top of the long incline we were less than forty feet apart.

The gun from the glove compartment lay ready in my lap, and at that stage it would have been a cinch to shoot a tire to pieces on the Ford, but the License Commission won't let you play rough except in self-defense. I was barely within my rights in attempting to stop these gorillas by driving them into the curb. They were topping the rise, and they knew enough not to try to compete with a heavier car going down. Steve Gusik swung right into a maze of crossroads, darting from corner to corner in desperate efforts to shake me off.

He gained some footage on me, but not much, and pretty soon his luck ran out—most hillside sections in this town are loaded with dead-ends. The sign NO THROUGH STREET flickered past, the cañon barricade loomed up, and both of us slammed on our brakes.

FOR a second or two there was only the hissing rain and the dog's impatient whine. Then the Ford started up with a roar and came barreling down upon me in reverse, wide open, in an obvious move to smash my radiator with its trunk. They had the drop on me, and my only bet was in driving straight ahead for a split-second job of steering clear.

The Packard bounced forward, frenziedly bucking the road's wet concrete, and swerved to the left like a drunk who is dodging the other guy's Sunday punch. Steel screamed on steel from grazing fenders, and the Ford slid by, still going all-out in reverse. I caught another glimpse of Steve's fat stolid mug, blankly expressionless. His clatterbox partner was huddled beside him, bracing himself in his seat. They had rounded the corner below the sign and skidded off downhill before I managed to pull up, just short of the barricade.

The dog was howling for their blood now, in a furious, deep-throated bay. I slapped him down, tooled around, and stuck my foot back on the accelerator. The Ford came back into sight two hundred yards ahead, slithering back to Sunset Boulevard, and traveling like sin. At the lights it had trouble again, turning west, and the distance between us closed up rapidly. I set my jaws and slugged through into traffic after them; they'd be dead ducks with one more crash. Already their vehicle wobbled a little and smoked up the neighborhood from its exhaust. This time I was going to use the gun, if they meant to get funny with me some more.

A siren keened behind me, picking up volume and speed in one of those sudden explosions of acceleration

that always spell motor cop. He came rocketing up beside me. I shook my head at him and pointed urgently to where the Ford was scampering off between two Diesel trucks. That helped a lot: he chopped at me once more and proceeded to reach for the leather flap on his holster. I grinned, prodded my brakes and eased into the curb.

He slid in front of me, dismounting ponderously and allowing his dripping machine to idle on the kickstand, with the radio turned up. Framed in my window, his face with the goggles pushed up was almost human, a pug-nosed Irish face, etched deeply by weather and late middle age. "So it's killing yourself you're after, son?"

"Not exactly," I said. "What I'm after is putting the arm on a couple of rats who tried to stick me up last night, that's what I'm after. They're in that car up there, the one you conveniently overlooked before you picked on me. If you turn on the juice, we might still run them down."

The motor cop gave me a deadpan stare, in due accordance with the regulations. His radio crackled out a bulletin on somebody's 503 in Griffith Park. "Stickup men, is it?" he asked with elaborate irony. "Sure now, and there's a crying shame." He was fumbling around for his ticket clip. "Let's see the driver's license, son."

I let him see the driver's license. He looked at it, and at Dave Hogan's card that had been pinned to it. On the back of the card appeared *Bearer O.K. extend courtesy* in a barely legible scrawl.

"So it's a friend of the Lieutenant you are," said the cop noncommittally. He took his gloves off, carefully unpinned the card with quick, hard-calloused fingers, stuck it in his clip. He handed me the pin, licked his pencil and wrote on the ticket pad.

"If you don't mind," I said sweetly, "that card is my property."

"Tis the Lieutenant's property, me boy. I'll be returning it," he told me equably. "You'll get it back if the Lieutenant's after letting you drive eighty in a twenty-five-mile zone. It's a favor I'm doing you, marking it down to forty-nine, so the judge won't be packing you off to jail." He ripped out the ticket and gave it to me and checked his duplicate. He stowed the clip and pulled his gloves on, pushed his goggles down, bestrode his glittering machine and roared away.

The dog barked after him, in plainly obvious disgust.

"Oh, darling, your pretty new suit!" Suzy cried.

She'd come running into the den, wearing a gayly flowered apron and still carrying a saucepan, when she heard me cross the patio. I grinned at her, a trifle sheepishly and shrugged out of my coat.

"What gives for chow?"

"You'll soon find out, greedy pig! That's all I mean to you, a combination mess sergeant and valet. Now I suppose you want me to fetch you your robe and your slippers, so you can make like the Rajah of Swat, on the couch by the fireplace yet."

"That would be nice."

She inspected the saucepan, as if she were wondering what it would do to my head. From the doorway she said: "You'll find a number on your desk to call. The girl downtown claimed it was urgent."

It had been jotted on my calendar, a Crestview number that appeared familiar. Since it came through my telephone-answering service, it could have been anything. I dialed it casually and stood patiently dripping on my old Navajo rug while listening to the distant burr-burr of the ringing signal. Khan slunk into the room, flopped down on the hearth and watched me from between his paws with saffron-lucent eyes.

"Allo?"

"Good evening, Your Highness, this is Marshall. My secretary left a note you phoned."

The caviar-and-vodka accent sounded almost unctuous. "Ah, my dear sir, we've been waiting for your call. You are steell interested from these mink?"

I chuckled wearily, and said: "In a haphazard sort of way. What's on your mind?"

"We've consider these affair. Ees question of reward, maybe."

"How's that again?"

"You are insurance-company detective, no?"

I didn't like that worth two cents. When you put up a front and they crash right on through it, it hurts your professional pride. "What about a reward?"

"Ees customary, ten per cent. For to recover property insured."

"Oh, did you come across a piece of stolen property that is insured?" I asked him carelessly.

"From a joke these ees not," he reproached me. "You weesh to find these coat, maybe we show you. Ees beez-ness matter, eh, my fran?"

"No deal. If you've got the blue mink, and you know that it's hot, you hand it over or we'll toss you in the bucket, kid. Receivers get up to ten years, in this State."

THE noise that came over the phone was between a sputter and a croak. "Plizz, you do not understand! We've not got these furl!"

"But you know where it is. That's good enough, for me and for the judge."

"Plizz, my fran, you must listen to us so we can make explain! From the reward we make no trouble, do you understand? We 'ave store' these Aleutian Blue in our vault since yesterday. Ees brought in by our customer, very reech man, sound okay, no questions asked. Then he come back, these afternoon."

"Are you trying to tell me McElroy himself came back?" I yelled at him.

"Yeah, sure," he lapsed, in purest Brooklynese. "Take the coat out of storage, from charges we make nothing. We ask him why, he says he wants to give for present to another girl."

"Did he leave an address?" I demanded to know.

That got me nothing but the same old runaround. I had already tried the Regent-Plaza once again from a drugstore, on my way back home, and the man with the Princeton accent had been brisk with me. His Imperial Highness seemed a trifle arch. "You weel 'andle these matter from confidence, plizz, my dear sir?"

I made a fairly rude suggestion on the subject and hung up on him. My dressing-gown, slippers and bath-towel entered the room on Suzy's arm. "Darling, such language!"

"That's all the Russian I know."

"Oh, goody. You did find the mink where I said."

She saw my face and heard me counting slowly to a hundred, by fives, while I wrung my shirt and climbed out of my pants. "Well, didn't you?"

"What gives for chow?"

"I'm not going to feed you until you tell me everything, so there." She stood on tiptoes so her lips could reach behind my ear. "Johnny, what's wrong?"

"Women," I said. "Threats and blandishments. If you're so smart, suppose you play this hand."

She perched on one arm of my swivel chair and watched the pencil race across the foolscap scratchpad on my desk. When I got through it looked about like this:

Wednesday

MORNING: Vivian McE gets letter from Western Life asking her consent to transfer \$250,000 insurance policy.

AFTERNOON: Vice Squad Sgt. Cliff Bush visits McE's office, carrying tape recorder. They fight about something McE is supposed to think over.

EVENING: McE dates Leila, quarrels with her on a life-insurance policy she's been nagging him about. He walks out, taking her mink. Phones his counsel, Fernandez, to ask advice on same. F. tells him a gift is a gift.

Thursday

MORNING: McE puts mink in storage at Sascha's, returns to hotel. Leila calls Mutual Indemnity, hires JM to repossess coat. Lt. Hogan, suspecting Bush of vice racket tieup, bugs Bush's apartment in his absence.

AFTERNOON: McE broods in hotel room.

EVENING: 8:00—Bush comes home, listens to radio, practices dramatic lessons.

9:15—McE leaves hotel, drives aimlessly to beach.

9:30—Bush puts symphony records on phonograph.

9:55 (?)—McE makes phone call from filling station (to Bush?).

10:15 (?)—McE arrives at Chateau Bayard, disappears.

10:30—JM finds Bush, murdered, apparently by right-handed killer. Observes portable machine (recorder) missing, recordings stolen from secret hiding-place behind TV screen. Lt. Hogan arrives with Sgt. Garcia.

11:00-12:00—JM interrogated at police HQ, attacked by Sgt. Matson, Bush's partner (who accuses him of killing Bush), released by Lt. Hogan.

12:10—Holdup of JM on way home by Greasy-thumb Steve Gusik and Loudmouth Hymie Cohn, foiled by dog.

Friday

MORNING: McE missing from his hotel. Leila upset, offers JM \$1,000 fee to find him and clear him of suspicion.

AFTERNOON: 2:30—Vivian McE denies contact with him over past 4 weeks, claims divorce obtained by him through fraud, denounces attorney Fernandez, refuses consent to transfer of life insurance policy. She confirms JM's impression that McE is lefthanded.

3:00—McE phones Fernandez, claims he's found a way to dispose of the mink so Leila can't make trouble. Visits Sascha, takes mink out of storage, says he needs it for a present to another girl. Sascha smells rat and fast reward buck, tries to phone JM.

4:00—Fernandez declares Vivian McE has been wonderful, generous and cooperative about divorce, but that she is reasonably protecting children's financial interests.

5:00—McE's unattractive secretary, Bettina Howe, denies hysterically that boss has done anything wrong. His office yields minor evidence showing he spent the night in it. Concealed in bathroom hamper; one portable tape recorder, with tape of man's voice, apparently Bush's, reciting balcony scene from "Romeo and Juliet." Bettina, tailed by JM, takes Glendale bus. JH in turn tailed by holdup men Steve and Hymie, drops Bettina, tries to bite tail. Traffic cop butts in, allows hoods to escape, writes ticket for speeding, ignoring Lt. Hogan's courtesy card. 7:23—Prominent Los Angeles private investigator retires from his profession, plans taking up petit-point embroidery and smoking marijuana.

The little woman frowned at me and at my piece of paper, thoughtfully. She did not seem to be especially amused.

"You like it, cherry pie?"

"Yes, very much. I think it's pretty clear."

"Oh, do you?"

"I certainly do. It's clear to me you never told me anything about those men holding you up last night."

"Well, what about it? I forgot. At the time, it just seemed like a simple coincidence."

"Oh, Johnny, *honestly!* If I hadn't sent Khan along with you, you might be dead yourself. And this silly bravado of yours, when you went after them alone! Darling, what do they want from you?"

"Now there," I said, "is an excellent question. My guess is they want the recording made by Bush that he was using for a club on them. They probably figure I must've picked it up, since the Homicide Squad came out of there with empty hands."

"But they took it themselves!" she protested. "They even found his cache behind the screen!"

"He may have had more than one hiding-place. The point is simple—nothing less would make them take a chance like that. You can see for yourself how it must have come off. The killer grabbed every private recording he could get his hands on, even those dramatic lessons. He checked them off right quick, most likely on that portable, a block or two away in his own car, and found he'd missed the crucial one. So he went back for it, and saw me being dragged away in durance vile. That gave him time to tap the grapevine, find out things about me, set a trap for me in case I'd be released without the formality of a real frisk. He must've thought I wanted to take over just where Bush left off."

"You mean McElroy, don't you?" Suzy said.

"If I do, it'll cost me. A thousand dollars is a lot of dollars."

"But Johnny, it's hopeless," she argued. "You've got enough evidence there to convict him a dozen times! None of this stuff you've written down makes any sense, not unless he's the boss of those racketeers. It makes no difference if he's lefthanded—he was there; he took the records and the portable, he ran away. Maybe one of his mobsters killed Bush while he stood by, but that would leave him just as guilty."

"He was alone all day and on his way to the apartment house."

"They may have met him there, while you were talking to the clerk. That phone call he made from the beach could have been to them," she pointed out triumphantly.

"Too many maybes, honey doll," I said. "This business of people leading double lives just doesn't jell. You're assuming a man could be fooling his wife, his fiancée, his secretary, his attorney and the cops, for a considerable period of time. I don't claim it's impossible, but I'm not sold."

She glanced at my notes on the pad and shook her auburn curls. "You'll have to buy it, darling," she declared. "McElroy's being there could be coincidence. Bush's recorder in his office could have been a plant. But you can't get away from the fact that he's gone into hiding."

"If that recording were not on the loose," I said, "the fact he ran might well be in his favor. Your average racket boss wouldn't bother to put on his hat unless he thought he couldn't beat the rap. As it is, it looks bad, because apparently he's playing 'possum while these musketeers of his are hunting for the gimmick. I'll have to mess with it and dig the dirt up anyway."

"You're not planning to go out tonight any more?"

"What gives for chow?"

She dropped my scratchpad on the desk and ground a dainty slipper heel into the rug, rather dangerously close to my bare toes. "John Marshall, you're out of your mind! Do you think I am going to let you leave this house to tangle with a trigger-happy bunch of gangsters for that stupid blonde of yours?"

"Look, baby lamb, it's not for—"

"No, you look! I couldn't stop you short of feeding you a slug of ant-repellent in your consommé. But don't expect to find me here when you come back—if you come back, that is. I mean it, darling. No sense in spending the rest of my life with a crazy man, or one who doesn't love me any more." She turned away abruptly.

"It's not as simple as all that," I said. "We'll have to square ourselves with Dave somehow."

"All I want you to do is drop this nasty case," the little woman said. "Please, Johnny, I'm not jealous. I just don't want you to get hurt. We can explain to Dave—I'll handle him."

I grinned at her and kissed one corner of her mouth. "Well, here goes that rosewood piano of yours."

The phone at 16 Sycamore Terrace rang for quite a while. At last I raised a female voice, slightly distorted. "Miss DeJong?"

"This is she." Out of breath and impatient with me, that was she.

"Sorry to trouble you so late," I said. "But it seems only fair to allow you the opportunity to hire another man. I'm afraid I shall have to beg off, after all."

"Really! Mr. I ask why?"

"It's just one of those things, Miss DeJong. The case is a little bit out of my line."

"But I distinctly understood— After all, aren't you supposed to make some sort of a report to me?"

"Yes ma'am, I am. It will be written up tonight and mailed you in the morning. But in the meantime, for your own protection, I shall have to lay the facts before the Sheriff's officer concerned."

"I see." She hesitated. "Have you found my coat, at least?"

"Sorry. Mr. McElroy took it out of storage late this afternoon."

"How tiresome! Look here, I'm expected to dine in Bel Air, and I'm terribly late as it is. If you would come to see me in the morning, please, I'm sure we shall manage to straighten things out."

She hung up in my ear, and I snickered at Suzy taking hers from the receiver. "Still jealous, sugar bun?" "Someone should teach her to roll over and play dead."

I laughed, a trifle hollowly, and spun the dial on my phone. "Lieutenant Hogan, please."

There were clicks and a series of buzzes, and Sergeant Garcia's tough young singsong voice. "Detectives, Hollywood."

"Marshall," I said. "How are you, Sergeant?"

"I'm doing pretty good," he told me with insulting emphasis. "You're kind of late, aren't you?"

"How's that?"

"We've got your statement here you were supposed to sign."

"You mean last night's? There'll be a little dividend on that. Your boss around?"

"Downtown. He's in a meeting with the Chief."

I stopped to think and said: "Well, have him call me, Sergeant, will you, please? Maybe we ought to get together when he's through. Say, listen, would you check the hotshet for me on a license plate I came across? New York 91 RC 1220."

He repeated the number, indifferently, then suddenly froze the wire: "You kidding me? Where did you see this plate?"

"I saw it on a Ford sedan that crashed a light on Sunset Boulevard this afternoon," I told him truthfully. "What's wrong with it?"

"It's a phony," he said. "But that's not what's wrong with it. I know it's a phony because any out-of-State license with that combination would've been issued by us to detective cars, as a spare for undercover work. And the New York tag happens to belong to Bush's crate, which has been missing since last night."

The front-door buzzer snarled, like somebody testing a new, improved electric chair out in the vestibule. I bared my teeth at it, and at the phone, and at the dog who was scratching the paint off the door and barking as if he expected the butcher boy.

"Just hold it a sec, will you, Sergeant?" I said. "If you hear anything, or if I'm not right back, put out a Code Three on the air for the riot squad. We seem to have company here, and I'm not sure which kind."

He grunted, and I laid the receiver on the blotter, and fumbled in a drawer for my spare artillery. The buzzer sounded off again, impatiently; the tiny .32 vest-pocket Colt played hooky under a batch of papers and junk. I fished it out at last and snapped the slide, thumbed down the catch and crossed the hall in three long strides.

HARRY ROSE shook the rain off his elegant coal-black fedora and surveyed me, hand on hip, from under the porch light, not uncritically. I palmed the Colt and came out of my flattened crouch against the wall behind the door, not fast enough.

"Oh, it's you," I said. "An unexpected pleasure."

He prodded Khan between the ribs with the toe of one polished if slightly mudstreaked dancing pump and simpered for me, rather unconvincingly. "It ain't Marlene Dietrich," he informed me. "Why the gat, you great big handsome bully?" He handed me his hat and shrugged off his dripping camel's-hair swagger and white silk foulard, revealing himself in all the glory of full evening dress. Suzy ran up and flung her arms about him, mugging it as if the camera were moving in on her for an important closeup. "Harry, darling, you look *wahnderfull*!" she cried in a Tallulah Bankhead bass.

I snorted at them and walked back into the den. The phone lay on the blotter, sputtering. I picked it up and said, "You can relax now, Sergeant. Ask the boss to call me when the meeting's over," and hung up. I pitched the gun back in the drawer, dropped into my creaky swivel chair and put my feet up on the desk.

"Get him," said Harry from the doorway, bitterly. "He thinks he's got a client yet."

"He just lost one," the little woman said, not clowning any more. "Supper will be on in fifteen minutes, if you want a bite. Roast pork with mushroom sauce, the way you like it."

"No can do. We've got a wedding banquet going; I slipped out on it between the game course and the *entremets*, with fifty thousand dollars' worth of presents sitting in the *vestiaire*." He scowled at me with a ferocity not altogether phony. "Where's McElroy, John?" he asked me, bluntly to the point.

"Et tu, Brutel!" I grumbled.

"Yeah, me too, that's right. Now listen, honey, fun is fun, but I'm supposed to be responsible when something happens to our guests, like maybe a little polite extortion, or a casual piece of the snatch, or any kind of early Halloween stuff, if you follow me. I'm not accusing you or anybody, but you better shoot the Valentino to me, Achmed boy, or Mamma's gonna be upset with you."

I looked at him, and he looked back at me until we both broke out a grin about as jolly as a couple of bookies with different odds on the favorite in the seventh. The

little woman, watching us, contributed a tinkling noise I vaguely recognized for a small raspberry of disapproval. "Men!" she said derisively, and grabbed my scratchpad off the desk.

"Hey, just a minute!" I protested. "All that rubbish happens to be confidential!"

"If you two characters don't trust each other, you might just as well go out of business," she told us firmly, tossing the pad into Harry's lap.

He blew her a kiss and fished out a pair of gold-rimmed glasses that made him look like Wilson in his Princeton days. It took him all of fifteen seconds to digest my notes.

"Reminds me of a wartime case I worked on with the Bureau," he observed quite soberly. "There was this lady back in Cincinnati, name of Mrs. Mildred Leberwurst, who wanted to divorce her husband, on account of he's parting his hair on the left or some such thing. So she visits the office of one Silas Whortleberry, who's running an ad in the personals of the *Herald-Telegram* where it says he's the guy to see if you're Worried and want to Make Sure. She offers him two yards if he'll fix it for her to put the bazooka on hubby in Alimony Court. So Whortleberry latches on to hubby's tail, and pretty soon gets wise to it that on the nights where Mr. Leberwurst lays claim he's working overtime, he's really in a huddle with two other fellows; they are getting ready to blow up a railroad bridge with maybe a couple of troop trains on it—you know how it was. The Nazi Bund, or what was left of it. While Silas is figuring the angles, what should happen but this fellow Leberwurst looks up and asks him why he's up there pecking through the transom. So there is a little argument, and we move in, and last I heard these fellows are still doing ten to life in Leavenworth. But Silas catches a snootful of slugs, and Mildred never gets to go to Alimony Court."

"I know," I said. "All dames are trusting, and all private ops are greedy pigs."

"Yeah, man! Lookit this Vivian of yours; she signs a piece in Spanish she can't even read. Lookit yourself, beating your brains out on a proposition where you've got to prove the innocence of an obvious felon on the lam, so you can make a score, less taxes and expense. How greedy can you get?"

I chuckled, but the little woman tossed her auburn curls, indignantly. "What about you?" she demanded. "If McElroy's a felon and a killer, you're the one who had him under your roof for three weeks, and you never found out! You should be grateful to my husband that he flushed him out for you. I don't care how long you were with the FBI, I still think John's a much better detective than you'll ever be, and if he thinks the man is innocent, he'll prove it in his own good time, without beating his brains out. And not because of the money, either, I'll have you know!"

By then I was laughing, and the dog with his massive head on our visitor's knee pricked up his ears and stared at each of us in alert bewilderment. Harry Rose removed his eyeglasses and winked at me. "Ain't love wonderful?" he asked me confidentially.

"Nyah to you!" the little woman said. "If you're so smart, why don't you go ahead and find this precious guest of yours that you're supposed to be responsible for? I'll tell you why. Because Esther would scratch out your eyes if she heard you were playing around again with a bunch of gorillas you didn't have to touch. So where do you get off, making cracks about love and this and that?"

He threw up his arm and cowered from her, elaborately. "Yes, dear," he agreed submissively. "You are so right. I'd better hurry back to see about those wedding presents, huh?" He winked at me some more, and

got up from under the dog, and dropped my notes back on the desk. "If I were you, I'd keep a weather eye out for the ladies," he admonished me. "They've got a tug of war on for a quarter million snackers of insurance, meaning that anything can happen there."

"I've already checked out of the case," I said.

In the hall, while I held up his coat for him, he mentioned carelessly: "You realize the guy is shackled up with his secretary some place down the line?"

"Shame on you, Harry!" I said. "You've got an evil mind."

"I know it, pet. It needs a ring job and a set of plugs." He punched me in the ribs as if he meant it. "Pork with mushroom sauce, you lucky still! She is a treasure, isn't she? Oh, well—remember the Alamo!"

Chapter Eleven



HAT NIGHT THE STORM BOUNCED OFF THE SAN Marino mountains in the east. When it came rumbling back toward the ocean like an ill-trained corps of kettle-drummers on parade, the luminous hands of my head-board clock pointed to two A.M.

I didn't need a storm to stay awake: The shaggy ball of wool I'd been using for brains was still tying itself into knots in a hopeless attempt to wrap up a killer, a blonde, a thousand dollars and my pride for me.

Then the extension phone, two feet from my left ear, released a modest tinkle.

Dave Hogan's dryly scornful bark came on the wire. "You still on deck?"

I squirmed from under Suzy's arm and blocked my voice away from her behind the pillow. "Some meeting you were in," I said.

"Yeah? I been hitting the sack since ten o'clock. So you been trying to lay hold of me? Grab this fur piece you was after?"

"Not yet," I said. "What's cooking, Dave?"

"I'm bushed," he grumbled. "All this overtime just kicks it outta you. So now it looks like I got to get rolling some more. Your client still want her mink?"

"Yes," I said. "Yes, Dave, I imagine she does."

"Okay, so come and get it, Johnny. The Montevista, out in Sherman Oaks. Meet you there in half an hour."

"Hey, just a minute," I protested weakly. "Where'd you get the notion it's a mink I'm looking for?"

"Police routine. You can't beat it, Johnny. Nobody can. Want me to send a squad car after you?"

"No, thanks. My car smells bad enough."

"Then shake the lead," he instructed me sharply, and hung up.

Behind my back a boot heel scraped the floor and the light clicked on; Mrs. Suzanne Willet Marshall in a black beret, white plastic raincoat, cashmere sweater, overshoes, and buttoning herself into a pair of mouse-gray flannel slacks, stood watching me with cool detachment. "Darling, there's no time to do your exercises."

"Where'd you think you're going?"

"Out," she told me dulectly. "With you."

"Listen, I may be in a jam. This trip could wind up in the clink for me."

"I'll come to visit you and bring you cigarettes," she promised me. "But you're not just about to leave me here alone. Not with a mob of thugs that's liable to break in any time."

I groaned in resignation, slammed into my clothes and tore my Army slicker off the hook. The dog was waiting for us at the kitchen door, his formidable yellow tail switching expectantly. I threw a body cloth at him he neatly dodged, and Suzy rubbed his stiffly pointed ears. "Why don't you let him go? He loves to ride so much."



The hat exploded in his hands. I almost didn't duck.

"Somebody's got to hold the fort."

"Oh, pooh! No one's going to bother us here. He just wants to be with the family."

Khan settled the issue by busting through the service porch and galloping off to the garage.

Outside, the storm was drifting over, but my windshield wipers still had work to do. Sherman Oaks is a fifteen-minute drive from Westwood, if you're in a hurry and the road across the hills is dry. We made it in twenty, by taking our lives in our hands. The Montevista wasn't hard to find, a sprawling disarray of small pink stucco bungalows at Juanita Cañon, off the San Francisco turnpike, near the end of the suburban tourist belt. The big neon sign claimed NO VACANCY, a likely story with three prowling cars and a Fire Department inhalator and an ambulance parked in the yard, illuminated like a Christmas tree.

The little office cabin up in front was bulging with the crowd. Two deputies in khaki lounged against the walls; the gum-chewing ambulance driver relaxed on a bench. Two Valley Station dicks I'd met before were talking to the manager, a blowsy female in her fifties, wrapped in a fake Japanese kimono. Lieutenant David Hogan seemed to be preoccupied with an old rustic character in tattered overalls, who leaned against the counter of the registration desk, puffing his stubby cornob pipe.

"Lo, Dave," I said. "What's the good word?"

He looked at me and at the little woman, bleakly cynical. The coddler with the pipe ignored us altogether.

"Meet Joe Baxter," Hogan instructed us. "Night watchman on that supermarket building job next door. The guy who smelled the gas."

"Oh, did somebody turn it on?" I asked him speciously. He just nodded and pushed the register my way and pointed with his thumb. The line thus marked announced in nervous, spattered pothooks that one Mr. Buddy Jones and wife, of Oakland, California, had made request for lodging on that Friday night. Another hand, with firmer strokes, had marked the time of their arrival as of nine P.M. and had assigned them Cabin 17.

"Dave, who are they?" inquired the little woman.

"You tell us," Hogan said to me.

I made no comment, waiting for him to get through with the act, and presently he beckoned with his chin. We walked behind him through the drizzle, down the slimy asphalt driveway, past a dozen cottages in silent darkness, carports yawning empty.

"Hot-pillow joint," he flung at us over his shoulder. "They all sashayed before our cruiser boys arrived."

"And so you thought of me," I said.

He grunted and kept walking. Cabin 17 was in the rear, no more than a few yards from the white picket fence that marked the boundary between the Montevista and the big construction job adjoining it. The tiny bungalow was brightly lit, by its own lamps and by the spotlights of two more official vehicles, one of them Hogan's battered old sedan. All windows had been opened and the screens removed; one had the glass knocked clean out of its frame. Around the driveway two more deputies were studying the hopeless crisscross web of tire tracks in the mud. Sergeant Ramon Garcia, his swarthy young hatchet-man's mug unperturbed, stood waiting for us on the porch.

Behind our backs, the Fire Department truck got started with a roar, clashed gears, and sirened off into the night.

"The doc's gone too, Lieutenant," said Garcia. "Claims they popped the hatch about an hour ago."

Hogan scowled in surprise. "You'd never think it would of taken 'em that long to get around to it," he said.

The bungalow was just a bedroom with adjoining bath, and furnished cheerfully in lacquered pine: one double bed, two easy chairs, two night-stands and a chest of drawers. The Mexican rug on the floor's glazed concrete was already worn down to the grain. Four plain white stucco walls were bare except for one small reproduction of a mountain scene, mostly trees and blue water, and coily labeled *Visit Lovely Lake Tahoe*. Flanking the bathroom door, a standard-size copper-enamelled radiator had been mounted in the floor. Its spigot pointer indicated OFF, but a faint reek of fuel gas persisted queasily about the room. A weedy youth in horn-rimmed spectacles, dead cigarette suspended from one corner of his mouth, was taking flashbulb photographs of what was on the bed.

The little woman looked and said, "Oh, Dave!" reproachfully, catching her voice just on the edge of quick distress.

"I didn't ask you to come here," said Hogan.

THE mink lay casually draped across a chair. I would have recognized it anywhere, but there it was, as advertised, the flaring cascade panels and the drooping sleeves, the towering *bouffante*. And it was blue, a glossy cast of sapphire steel frosting the rich mahogany complexion of the pelts. This was not just a garment or a piece of fancy goods—it was a symbol in itself, of women's vanity and men's temptation to indulge, of pride and sacrifice and lust, oddly out of place in that shabby room.

On the dresser they'd made a display of the exhibits: watches, wallets, keys, cigar case, handkerchiefs, the routine contents of a lady's purse. I saw a billhead of the Regent-Plaza and stopped speculating how they'd tied me into this. One of the nightstands had an empty pillbox on it and the bathroom's toothbrush glass, still partly filled, and dusted already for prints. *Can't beat police routine*. . . . I pursed my lips and asked: "What's this supposed to be, a goofball jag?"

"Amytal," said Garcia. "The greatest thing since Seven-up."

Hogan inquired: "This girl your client?"

"No. His secretary. The way I hear, she had a crush on him."

"So it seems," he admitted sardonically. "What else you hear you'd care to sort of let us know about?"

"Not very much," I said. "The coat's my client's property. This man McElroy gave it to her, but last Wednesday night they had a squabble, and he took it back. He must've given it to this young lady as a gesture, probably because she stuck with him and let him hide out at her place. Sure, I admit it looks as if he killed Bush. I'd no reason to think so last night, but—people are always disappointing you."

"Dave, that poor silly girl!" said Suzy tearfully. "Don't you see, she found out, and it shocked her so much she decided to end it all. She must have dosed him with those pills, and taken some herself, and then turned on the gas. She realized we'd catch him, and he'd be executed, and she'd have to go to jail for helping him."

"He knew all that himself," I said, "when Steve and Hynnie blunked the job of getting this recording back for him."

Garcia had his notebook out and was scribbling away as we talked. Hogan just stared at me. "That what you was trying to call me about?"

"Of course. The missing recording must have been what knocked them for a loop. They knew Bush had it—they'd searched his apartment and grabbed every record in sight; they even took his car. Then when they found they'd somehow overlooked it, they got after me. I might be playing hide-the-slipper with them, like Bush."

HOGAN said wryly: "What we get for being nice to you! I should of kept in mind that all you private scumcos are interested in is picking up a dirty buck."

One of the deputies outside showed his head at the window. "Hey, Lieutenant, will you look at this a minute, please? We got a lunny one."

They were still worrying about those tracks. We all trooped out to see, leaving only the skinny photographer behind to pursue his grisly chores. The deputies were in a huddle on the driveway where it curved away from Cabin 17, beyond the carport slab. Their flashlights pointed at the junction of a service alley wandering along the picket fence. The alley was a single-lane affair, unsurfaced and half-concealed behind a ragged Chinese privet hedge. Its mud supplied a set of tire tracks, deep and fresh, that mingled undecipherably with a score of others on the driveway skin.

"Goodyear six-ply balloons," Garcia said. "A464's. That's him all right, Lieutenant. He must've lost his way when he came in."

"That so? Them tracks run all the way in from the boulevard."

We stood looking at them in the drizzle for maybe a minute or two that seemed like a couple of years. Then Hogan said: "Get pictures and a cast. Somebody call this Baxter guy."

I nudged Garcia. "How about those prints you dusted on the water-glass in there?"

"The girls," he told me briefly, put his steno book away and made off for the office cottage at a run. One of the deputies had gone for the photographer. The rest of us drifted back to the carport attached to Cabin 17—just two blank walls, a composition roof, a floor of cracked cement. The black convertible had been shoved in nose first, with all its windows raised. It did have Goodyears, the diamond pattern, in perfect shape.

"Kind of wet, if it's been here since nine," said Hogan doubtfully.

The second deputy applied his flashlight over it. The Cadillac was streaked with mud, one of its fenders lightly scratched as if by raking brush. Outside the wipers' segments on the windshield some big raindrops had remained intact. I touched the canvas top and shook my head.

Garcia returned with the two Valley Station dicks and with the old gaffer in overalls whose tarpaper night-watchman shack was barely visible across the fence. Hogan confronted him. "You see this heap before?"

"Well, now, Cap'n, I can't exactly say fer shore. Be like the Gospel teaches folks—thou shalt not bear false witness 'gainst thy neighbor. They's lots of cars an' all goes by here every night."

"This one came up the lane. You should of noticed it."

Joe Baxter puffed his pipe and squinted at us through the fetid smoke. "Reckon I did," he said uneasily. "Don't make good sense it'd be this'n here."

"Why not?"

"Was after twelve, the only car I seen come up that way. Those folks which trespassed on the Lord been in since nine last night."

One of the Valley Station dicks said: "That manager's no use to us, Lieutenant. She don't remember what this Jones guy looked like when he signed the register. She claims the dame stayed in the car; they always do."

Garcia was poking around inside the Cadillac's tonneau. "Still damp," he reported. "There's plenty of dirt on the rug. They were in here no more than two-three hours ago." He whistled and held up a muddy paper square against the light. We all crowded around him to catch a peek; the paper was one of those throw-away napkins they serve you in cheap cafés. One side bore the marks of a masculine rubber heel, quite new and fresh. The printing on the other side was badly smeared though still faintly legible: THE EATMORE ALL-NIGHT COFFEE SHOP.

"Somebody check this dead guy's shoes," said Hogan.

One dick went away and came back in a matter of seconds, slightly green around the gills. "You guessed it, Lieutenant," he said. "Want us to call downtown and get the lab detail?"

"Sure, go ahead. You fellas stick around. We'll give this Eatmore joint the up 'n' down."

Garcia said: "If your hunch is the same as mine, Lieutenant, there's a nasty job we've got to do."

"They're all the same. County pays you good money for doing 'em. Pick up the fur piece—we'll need an identification on it."

"Dave, may we go along?" the little woman begged. He turned his weary frown on her, impartially scornful. "Yeah, you can go along," he allowed. "We ain't through with you two, and maybe if we keep an eye on you, you don't get into no more trouble."

Chapter Twelve



THE COFFEE SHOP TURNED OUT TO BE ONLY A few hundred yards away, on Highway 101, a block or two east of the Durango underpass. There wasn't much to it: a plain redwood shanty, a couple of floodlighted billboards behind it, a curb-service lot and a

Truck Drivers Welcome sign.

Khan woke up when I swung off the road and clicked bumpers with Hogan's car. He yawned at us, surveyed the premises with jaundiced eye and scrambled at the door. We let him out and followed the two Sheriff's officers into the joint.

Inside it was warm and dry, with the aroma of onions and hamburger frying. At the counter two high-school-age couples in evening dress were noisily stuffing themselves and feeding nickels to the juke-box playing bop. A hard-faced Mexican in filling-station jeans observed our arrival, hastily finished his snack and sidled out. The red-faced cook behind the counter glared at us and killed his cigarette.

The waitress chewed gum while she cleared off a table for us. She was young and too fat, with good-natured Scandinavian features. She gave the mink Garcia carried on his arm no more than a glance of curiosity.

Hogan inquired: "See one like that before?"

She ignored him. She brought us ice water, four sets of sleazy tableware and four more paper napkins, minus heel-prints. "Whatcha gonna have?"

"Draw four," I told her hurriedly. "My treat."

"Hey, listen—" Hogan tried to muscle in.

I kicked him in the shins. The waitress flounced away. The little woman said: "Dave, can't you tell? She doesn't recognize the coat."

"Could be. We'll just make sure of that."

"This bunch of yours," I said. "If there's anything to it, you know they were never in here."

"Yeah, they'd stayed outside. Don't make no difference. They still got service from the dame."

"Not in this rain," I said.

The waitress returned with our coffee. Hogan pointed at the mink and told her: "Grab another load."

SHE stared at him and at the coat, uncertainly. "It's pretty, ain't it?" she declared. "What it is, Mister, some new kind of silver fox?"

Garcia chortled. Suzy took it off his arm and showed it to her. Hogan's corrugated-leather face looked just as blank as if someone had told a joke he didn't understand.

"Was you on duty here all night?"

The gold-plated buzzer was flashing in his hand. She flinched from it as if it were a spider. I grinned at her, more or less reassuringly; the little woman said: "Don't worry, honey, they're not after you. They think a girl was here tonight who wore these furs. Do you remember her?"

"We ain't done anything," the waitress said. Her surliness was injured innocence. "Nobody come in wearing fur. Why don't you nosy cops lay off? We got a hard enough time getting trade without you scaring it away."

"So there was cops in here before," said Hogan carefully.

"You wouldn't know!" she taunted him. "Yeah, they was here, just after twelve tonight, two cars of them."

"That so? What kind of cars?"

"I didn't notice, Mister. They park outside, right over there. First one pulls in, the man gets out and walks up to the service window, snoops around and asks me has this girl come in that is supposed to wear them furs. So I says no, and he picks up two cuppa coffee to take out and goes back to his car."

"What kind of looking man was he?"

"Aw, I dunno. It was raining but good. Big feller with a black mustache that talked just like a cop, you know, as if he owned the place. So then this other car drives in, and parks beside him, and he talks to them, and he comes back and takes out two more cuppa coffee, see? Is how I know there's four of them, like in your party here. Say, are you kidding? Maybe it was you."

"How long'd they stay?"

"Gee, Mister, what's it to you? Whatcha doing, anyway, you fellas checking on each other? I didn't watch—next time I looked outside, them cars was gone."

She flounced away again. I made a face at Hogan and reminded him: "Ten minutes would be all he'd need."

"Could be."

"Try it sometime. Six grains of amylal in coffee ought to knock you off your pins in less than that."

He pushed his cup away and rose. "Let's blow," he told us wearily.

Outside, Garcia played his flashlight on the spot that had been pointed out to us. The asphalt lot was badly

riddled by a hundred tracks, most of them washed by rain into illegibility. There were plenty of throw-away paper napkins and assorted muddy debris lying about. The flashlight poked around among them like a prodding magic wand and stopped abruptly on a gravel-clotted pothole near the highway rim.

"Phone Casey over to the other dump," said Hogan. "Got to make a cast of this." He found an empty packing case and upended it over the hole.

The gravel showed a single heavy imprint of a Good-year tire, the striking diamond design.

Garcia pushed the mink into my arms and trotted off. We trudged back to our vehicles, and Hogan beckoned us to wait in his. "So you figured the angles on this deal," he probed me grudgingly.

"I've managed to stay with it, Dave," I said. "But only just. You know, police work must be real tough, like riding a paper-delivery route."

"Okay, you tell it," he invited me, and his tone was suspiciously bland.

"McElroy never did kill Bush," I said. "But Matson did. They were in it together on the payoff end, which was to be expected, when you come to think of it. I guess they had a fight about the spoils—Bush meant to put the screws on to increase the take, and Matson must have tried to slow him down. McElroy had refused to play and might decide to check his hand, suspend all operations of the racket for awhile and duck to Mexico until the heat came off. If that had happened, the recording Bush had made would have been so much junk. But with Bush dead, it became dynamite. McElroy had to have it, since it compromised him in a murder case, and Matson had no choice: unless he gave it up, McElroy's testimony would have put him in the death house, fast. So after they hurriedly searched the apartment together, McElroy took everything they found."

"You was tailing him there?"

"Yes, but I lost him in the building. I thought he had a heavy date, and I wanted the coat. I'm fairly sure he arrived there too late to be in on the fight. Then of course when he'd left and found out that the record he wanted had been overlooked somehow, he set those hoods of his on me with the idea I must've picked it up. He couldn't quite afford to run for cover, not until he had his hands on it. And Matson had to help: by getting Bush's car for him, by busting in while you were questioning me last night, by trying to take over—you recall how much he wanted me for fifteen minutes to himself, and how he worried whether I'd been frisked."

"DAVE, don't you see?" the little woman urged. "He picked a fight with Johnny right away, just for the chance of touching him and going through his clothes!"

"Could be."

"You know that's how it was," I said. "You also know what happened here. The record is still missing, and McElroy must've put it up to him—delivery tonight or else. But Matson couldn't make delivery. He reached McElroy through his secretary and agreed to meet them at this place. He brought a box of amylals and doped their coffee, drove them over to the Montevista and got rid of them in Cabin 17. He staged it pretty neat, at that: he even put the girl's prints on the water-glass. We might've fallen for it if your deputies had failed to spot those tire-tracks in the alley, where they had no business to be."

"That don't explain how come these people registered in there at 9 P.M."

"Go on with you! They didn't, either. Most likely Matson did, himself. Or if he wanted to, he could've walked right in and pulled a roust on any of those cabins, as a Vice Squad cop. The only reason why he used the alley was because he had two bodies in the car."

"You got no faith in cops, could be what's wrong with you," said Hogan. "Who did you figure was this second guy he had along?"

Garcia climbed in with us out of the rain. "All set, Lieutenant," he announced. "The lab detail is up there now. You want me to get Dan's 10-20 on the radio?"

Beside me, on the back seat, Suzy's elbow suddenly hit mine. "Dave, may I have a light here, please?"

"What for?"

"There's something you might want to see."

He snapped the dome light on. She had been playing with the mink, and had it folded open on her lap. The lining of navy blue silk still had my client's monogram, a rather ostentatious LDJ in coral needlework. But way below it, just an inch or two above the hem, there was a flat round bulge perhaps eight inches wide.

WE looked at it in startled silence for a while; then Garcia came up with a pair of scissors from his first-aid kit.

"This stitching's awful clumsy," said the little woman scornfully, and handed us a shiny aluminum spool of recording tape with all the casual aplomb of a magician who extracts a lighted cigarette from your ear.

"Hold everything, girls," I said. "It just so happens I've got a machine in the trunk of my car."

Nobody seemed to think this very much of a coincidence. They let me go and fetch it, take the Romeo reel off and slip it in my pocket, put the new reel on and hook it up. Then it occurred to me we needed electricity. Garcia smirked at me, inspected the portable nonchalantly and found the switch that worked a battery circuit.

The reel came on with a hum and a click, ran silent for a spell and suddenly gave us the groan of a starter, the roar of an engine firing up.

"Get in!" Sergeant Dan Matson's gritty bass said harshly, with a clarity that almost made me jump.

A car door slammed, springs creaked, gears clashed. Another click: the reel transmitted just a drone. The little woman whispered: "Johnny, what—"

"Erasure. Where somebody said something that didn't fit. Probably Bush, including himself out."

The drone snapped back into the steady purring of a car in motion, mixed with traffic noises from outside—brakes, tires on asphalt, even the clang of a trolley bell. Then Matson's voice again: "Okay, let's have it, boy."

The blatant nasal whine that answered him was unmistakable. "Hey, listen, Sarge, ya wanna take it easy, huh? We only got three bills for ya this time. They's a couple joints that's kinda behind on collections, what-tahell, them dames have gotta live, huh, Sarge? The way we figure, me an' Steve, we're gonna make it up next week, okay?"

"Three bills!" The grit had turned into a coarser texture. "Why, you lousy punk, you ought to drag that much from the Rosita deal alone!"

The conversation lapsed into profanity. Its drift remained quite clearly understandable, a sordid bickering about the profits of a sordid enterprise. There was no further mentioning of names, no third voice making any contribution, though on several occasions the erasure drone recurred. The reel ran on for ten or fifteen minutes and supplied about as damaging a piece of evidence against an officer as you could come across.

They made their peace at last, the man who had sworn to enforce the law and the rat he had privately licensed to break it, for a nice big share in some of the dirtiest money around. They agreed that the rat would do better next week, or the man was to feel free to breakfast on his liver. I got a little sweaty, on toward the end; in my

line of trade, one gets accustomed to a certain measure of iniquity among one's fellow so-called humans, but I couldn't go for this particular example of it very much. I felt relieved when it was over and I could rewind the reel and drop it in Dave Hogan's lap.

"You still think the guy killed Bush?" he asked.

"I don't think any more. Now I know it for sure. Don't you?"

"It don't add up the way you said."

"All right, so McElroy held out on him when they were searching the apartment. He wanted that reel to protect himself in the clutches, just in case we'd try to hang this murder rap on him. And it would come in handy later on, to keep Matson in line. That's why McElroy didn't run away to Mexico: all he needed to do was pretend and lay low for a couple of days and see how things came out. The trouble about that was Matson's catching on and Loudmouth Hymie being just as much involved. They figured a system to make him the fall guy, and get back the evidence implicating them at the same time. It might have worked, but as it happens they missed out."

"Kind of a narrow miss," said Hogan.

"But Dave, why did they go to all this trouble?" Suzy questioned him. "If McElroy was hiding in that poor Miss Howe's apartment, they could just go there and take him by surprise."

Garcia said: "He wasn't in her place last night. She probably kept him there most of the day, but he had to get out before her roommate showed. We checked on that by phone before you came on deck."

"Get that noisy contraption of yours out of my car," said Hogan, testily. "Why don't you two quit pestering me when I got work to do?" He picked up his radio mike off the dashboard and leaned on the button; the little telltale light glowed red. "Sixteen W calling dispatcher," he snapped.

I closed the lid on the black portable and hesitated, saw the little woman's wink and shrugged. She had the mink over one arm and she was backing out of the tonneau with it.

"Hey, leave them rabbit tails," Garcia said.

THE radio exploded in a burst of static, cleared its throat and emitted a boredly officious masculine voice. "Go ahead, Sixteen W."

"Gimme 10-20 on Detective-Sergeant Matson, will ya please!"

A tiny note of curiosity crept into the dispatcher's tongue. "Sixteen W, Roger," he said and paused; from twenty miles away across the hills came the rustle of paper being thumbed. "Forty-two, what's your 10-20?"

Garcia said: "He's on the graveyard shift all right. Alone."

"Forty-two, come in, Code One. What's your 10-20, Forty-two?"

I rested the portable back on my knee and sat down again. Suzy stared at the radio speaker below the dash, her lovely profile white and tense. The two in the front seat ignored us as if we had ceased to exist. "You think the fellow could of got a tip?"

"We're tipping him right now, Lieutenant. If he's smart enough to get the pitch."

"I got to locate him and call him in, don't I?"

The dispatcher spoke up. "Sixteen W. I can't seem to raise him, Lieutenant. Want me to keep on trying?"

The mike button clicked; the short-wave transmitter came up with a hiss. "Request all cars to make report if they know Forty-two's 10-20, please."

"Sixteen W, Roger." By now the voice in the control room wasn't bored. "Attention, all cars—"

I coughed, and nodded to the little woman, urgently. We got out of there, back to our car; I dumped the port-

*10-20: police code for "present location."

able into the trunk and slid behind the wheel and set my one-way radio to catch the Sheriff's station.

"... last seen at Pico and Columbus half an hour ago by *Ninety-five*," the dispatcher was saying excitedly.

Behind us, Khan woke up and sniffed the air distrustfully, and laid his huge black muzzle in between our heads. Hogan's battered sedan sprang to life, belched a cloud of rank blue smoke, turned up its siren with a growl and was off down the highway like a banshee crashing out of hell. I flicked my windshield wipers on and plowed the asphalt after it.

THE Pico-Columbus intersection, as late as 1946, amounted to two minor boulevards crossing in no man's land. For miles around, the rolling countryside extended west toward the beaches, south toward the oil-fields and the harbor docks. The postwar building boom found land for sale there, cheap, and proceeded to cover those miles with a rash of new construction. But in the southeast sector something like a dozen blocks has been fenced in and subdivided into landscaped lots of half an acre each. Here, architects and decorators had their day with brick, fieldstone, picture windows, parquet floors.

The rain had stopped, and dawn was breaking timidly across the Baldwin Hills. A solitary city sweeper lumbered through the intersection as we slid in to the curb; no other traffic seemed available on either street. The filling-station lot across Columbus was in darkness, but a spotlight blinked at us behind the office shack. Hogan's car dipped its lights in reply, and a black-and-white cruiser came slithering out of the lot, tooted briskly around and whined back in reverse, to double-park beside us, facing west. The driver's partner hit the deck; he looked at me and at the Packard, doubtfully. "These folks with you, Lieutenant?" he inquired.

Hogan leaned through his window to give me a scowling doubletake. "Don't you ever go home?"

"I've got to make expenses, Dave," I said. "You're sitting on that mink. My client's property."

He snorted at me and turned back to the prowler deputy. "What gives?"

"We found him, Lieutenant," the deputy said. The clipboard with his time sheet banged against a fender when he hauled it out. "At 4:15 A.M.," he read, "observed detective patrol Forty-two making illegal turn against the lights at Pico and Columbus. Stopped driver and identified. No action taken. 4:53 A.M.: received dispatcher's bulletin requesting this patrol's 10-20. Reported incident. Received instructions from dispatcher: meet Lieutenant Hogan, Sixteen W, on scene of incident. Proceeded there by way of Alta Costa, Mansfield Drive and Pico Boulevard. Observed patrol car Forty-two, unoccupied, on Mansfield, eighteen-hundred block. 5:25 A.M.: Met Sixteen W as ordered, made report."

"Hell, man, you couldn't find him," Hogan said. "You found his car. You should of pulled a stakeout on it right away and climbed into your radio, is what you should of done. Don't you guys ever learn anything?"

The crestfallen kid almost dropped the clipboard in confusion. "Sorry, sir. We didn't realize it was a pinch."

"What do I got to do, spell out a warrant for him on the air? Okay, you masterminds can show us where. Let's shake the lead."

We doused our lights and made more U-turns in the middle of the block and hustled south, into Columbus Park. The cruiser charged up Mansfield Drive in second gear. It boiled across the hillcrest and pulled up on squealing brakes behind a black sedan parked in the shadow of a large banana palm.

This time we all got out to see, just like a bunch of rubbernecks watching a drunk in the gutter. Forty-two was a Chevy, in pretty good shape. It still was very much unoccupied. Garcia touched the radiator screen

and shrugged; he raised the hood and flipped all six ignition wire caps off the plugs.

"Johnny, where did he go?" the little woman breathed.

The question had its merits; there were half a dozen private driveways to the block, and many more within two minutes' walking distance. Patrolling vice-squad cops don't always park their cars right out in front. The prowler boys were shuffling their big feet. "Want us to check around the neighborhood, Lieutenant?"

Hogan just stared at him. Garcia said: "It's on your beat. You guys should know what's going on."

"Yes sir," said the kid with the clipboard. "We should, but we can't figure out what he's up to here. Most of these places are still up for sale; there's three of them right on this block. There's a doctor in 1805, and a man with a wife and four children in 1809, he owns a business in Santa Monica."

Suzy drifted back from looking at a mail-box. "Who is Doyle in 1812?" she asked.

The kid ignored her, but the prowler driver said: "That must be the old lady who moved in last month. She seems to do a lot of entertaining."

Hogan stiffened and Garcia winked at me. The little woman tossed her auburn curls. "There's a name for the house been painted on the gate," she told us dutely. "It's the Villa Rosita, if you want to make something of that."

"Well, I'll be damned," said Hogan solemnly.

"You ought to drag that muck from the Rosita deal alone." I almost laughed out loud and started walking; at the gate, the pack caught up with me. The house stood on a knoll of its own, at the top of a hundred feet of sloping lawn, a new two-story residence, Bermuda-style.

Hogan opened the gate and marched ahead of us; his muddy boots crunched out a steady rhythm on the oyster shell. . . . The door chimes tinkled somewhere inside. Nothing happened for quite some little time. The prowler driver made a fist and banged the door with it. The porch light flickered on and the door swung ajar three inches on its chain. Part of a woman's head and half a sleeve of flowered silk peignoir peered out at us. The head exposed a mess of crow's feet, dabs of cold cream, steel-gray hair done-up in papillotes, and one bright little coal-black sparrow's eye.

"Is something wrong?"

SHE could have fooled me if I'd been in any doubt. She sounded exactly as she was supposed to sound, a cultured old lady prepared to resent the intrusion of her charming home by some very rude people at a perfectly unearthly hour. Hogan showed her his pretty gold badge. "You got one of my officers here. Just send him out, is all we want of you."

"I beg your pardon. I'm Mrs. Doyle, and no one's here but my three nieces and myself. You have the wrong address, I'm sure."

"Quit stalling, lady," Hogan told her wearily. "Somebody might get hurt. We don't figure on pinching this crib of yours today." He wiggled a handful of fingers behind his back, and Garcia made off for the rear at a run.

I plodded after him toward the service yard and noticed lights being switched on inside and heard the front door being slammed and the hushed sibilance of women's voices through a window screen. The yard looked bleak and bare, just a square of concrete, a waste incinerator and some trash cans piled with empty bottles. In the carport were two small coupés, a station wagon and a Ford sedan. Garcia checked his stride to glance at it, and I caught up with him. His startled whistle didn't tell me anything. The Ford had New York license plates.

He started fumbling for his gun, reluctantly, and grinned at me. "You heeled?"

"Not on this trip."

"Then you better stay out of it, fella. This could turn out we buy ourselves a rugged deal."

I pursed my lips for him. The kitchen door opened, and Matson stepped out on the service porch, just as casually as if he only had in mind dumping more bottles in the trash. The rising sun's first rosy fingers reached for him and touched his broken nose, his bristling black mustache. He carried the sweatstained straw fedora in both hands, as if it were a prayer book. He did not seem surprised to find us there.

Garcia's gun was not in sight. He said: "How are you, Dan? The boss is here with me. He wants to talk to you."

"Yeah? What about?"

"He'll have to tell you that himself."

The big man nodded and said hoarsely: "Sure, I'll talk to him. But first," he carefully explained, "this private jerk you guys been keeping for a pet, I'm gonna blast a hole through him."

The hat exploded in his hands. I almost didn't duck, the whole thing was so strictly from unreal. Garcia's shoulder hit me just in time, and both of us flopped on the muddy concrete behind those garbage cans. The kitchen door banged shut. The clipboard kid, who had come pounding down the driveway, charged into the yard and pumped six bullets into it.

HE made quite a picture, standing there facing that door with his feet wide apart and presenting the edge of his body, the way he'd been taught on the pistol range down at Miranda Point. Upstairs a window shattered open and another gun lashed out. The kid looked surprised, and dropped his, and fell to his knees.

Garcia put a shot into the broken window while I ran across the yard and dragged the kid into the carport, out of hock. The slug had smashed into a hip bone, ranged around it and had settled in the groin; I could feel its irregular oval blister just below the skin. He wasn't in danger and seemed more bewildered than hurt. I left his empty gun with him and told him to relax. I climbed a picket fence behind the carport, broke through twenty yards of brush and slid downhill to Mansfield Drive. At the gate of the Villa Rosita I ran into the little woman who was calmly leaning on the mailbox pole and reconditioning her face.

"Did you get them?" she artlessly wanted to know.

"Does it sound as if we did?"

A fresh fusillade broke out on both sides of the house. I saw the prowler driver on the lawn behind the sycamore, methodically taking aim. Another window shattered noisily; a scream came drifting down to us, half terror, half excitement, plainly feminine. "Where's Dave?" I said. "It'll take the Marines to knock over this place."

Hogan broke cover from an oleander bush and came tramping across the lawn, unhurriedly, his rockhard Irish features grimly unconcerned. "Get your wife out of here," he told me evenly.

"Let's see you try to make me, sweetie," Suzy said.

He stared at both of us as if we'd snubbed his mother. "Pack a gun?" he asked me coldly.

"In my car."

"Okay, you're deputized. I got no time to swear you in. Just keep her off my back and take a couple potshots at this mob until the help arrives. Don't get yourself plugged." He dived into his own sedan and grabbed the mike. "Sixteen W calling dispatcher. Clear the air, clear the air."

"All cars stand by!" The dashboard speaker's monotone was placid. "Okay, Lieutenant, go ahead."

"We got a shooting match on Mansfield, eighteen hundred block. We got several suspects under surveil-

lance, resisting arrest. Need assistance, need assistance, Code Three."

"Sixteen W, Roger. Attention, Hollywood station. All Hollywood units proceed to eighteen hundred block on Mansfield Drive, assist, assist! Use caution, Code Three." The dispatcher caught his breath and inquired: "You want an ambulance, Lieutenant?"

"Sixteen W, affirmative on ambulance. Make it two, O'Hara, we got lots of work for them!"

I ran back to the Packard where Suzy was having a time with the dog, who'd been howling his head off and charging the windows, trying to get out and join the fun. He saw us and redoubled his attempts until she spoke. "Down, Khan honey, down! You-all be good now!" suh.

The big hound pricked up both his ears so fast they clicked, cocked his enormous head at her, uttered a piercing whine and dropped back to the floor. I reached in through the sidewing, patted him, and punched the glove compartment lock.

"You'd better stay here, angel cake."

"Why, Johnny? I'll be careful. Honestly, I will."

"You're not going to like what you'll see."

"I don't mind. As long as I'm with you."

They haven't learned, not in a hundred thousand years. Not since they used to tag along while you went after sabertooth tiger with a club. I shrugged it off and started running, past the gate and up the hill again and through the sage brush, back to the Villa Rosita's service yard. Already the sirens came shrilling in from everywhere, and for ten miles around the early-weekend sleepers would be cursing in their beds.

"Darling, those poor, misguided girls in there!"

"Well, what about them?" I demanded. "If they're halfway smart, they've locked themselves into the bathroom. What do you suggest, that mob should bring them out under a flag of truce?"

"If they were halfway smart, they'd be wearing blue mink and living in Beverly Hills," the little woman pointed out to me.

"Yeah, it's a cruel world," I said, and jumped into the drainage ditch behind the picket fence.

Garcia was twenty yards away, still crouched among the garbage cans. He held his fire while they were sniping at him from upstairs, with the slugs pinging harmlessly off into space or crashing through bottles to shower him with broken glass. He heard us scrambling in the ditch and grinned at us across his shoulder, recklessly.

"Want me to bail you out?" I yelled at him.

He grinned some more and shook his head and pointed to his gun. I dug up a box with a couple of dozen .38 shells, shook half of them into my pocket, closed the box and lobbed it over to him like a hand-grenade. He caught it on the fly and waved at me. Then he pointed again, where the hillside dropped steeply into a small ravine.

I struggled through a batch of poison ivy down the ditch. The upstairs sniper took a shot at me; it went whispering by through the brush like a snake on the run. The little woman pulled my coat tail. "Are you letting them get by with that?"

"They can't get out that way."

GARCIA backed me up by blasting at the sniper, twice. There were more women screaming from inside the house. What seemed to be the dining-room had been constructed like the bottom leg of an inverted L. It came up to the edge of the cliff, and would be out of range from both the front lawn and the service yard. Someone was at the window, knocking out the screen.

He got his foot caught in the copper mesh. I drew a bead on it and put a bullet through it, just like that. It was only a foot, with a shoe and six inches of Argyle sock sticking out through a window screen and momen-

tarily immobilized, at fifteen yards. A schoolboy could have hit it with a water pistol. The screen caved in, the foot jerked back, the man let out a yelp, like a dog who'd been kicked in the ribs.

"That's my boy who did that," Suzy said approvingly. "Keep your head down, cherry pie," I said. "We've got them bottled up, but they're not going to surrender. I wouldn't either, not on a cop-killing rap."

"How many of them do you think there are?"

"Just our three friends. They'd already have tried to crash out if there were any more. They're making all that noise to keep your spirits up, like the fellow who walks through a graveyard whistling to himself."

From the direction of the front lawn came the savage stutter of a riot gun. I was reminded of the sign put up by an exterminator company downtown: Doc Kilzum, The Doctor of Bugs—His Patients All Die. The hillside resounded with men slogging up through the brush and shouting to each other; three of them, carrying shotguns, appeared in the little ravine. Two more were climbing to the carport roof. A grizzled patrolman in khaki dropped into the ditch with us and looked us over from behind his pistol sights.

"You this private snooper the Lieutenant deputized?"

"That's me," I told him cheerfully, and took another snapshot at the house, just to prove it to him.

He pushed my gun arm down. "Nix, nix, you're supposed to get back to the street. And take the lady with you, brother. We're all set to lush 'em out..."

A shotgun boomed downhill, and another: the broken remains of the dining-room window collapsed in clattering shards. The early-morning breeze brought us the sudden pungent razor edge of tear-gas fumes.

It happened fast, before we'd reached the picket fence. The kitchen door flew off its hinges, Hymie Cohn came sailing out and cleared the service porch, landing smack on his buttocks on the wet concrete. The gas had him coughing and retching and clawing at his eyes, but he still waved a gun, like a ticket to Potters' Field. Behind him, Steve Gusik was dragging himself to the porch on hands and knees, apparently unarmed, one foot a bare and gory mess.

There was a long half-second of appalling silence. Then someone shouted, inarticulately, and the yard erupted in a yellow flash, a crackling thunderclap.

Suzy was sitting in the bottom of the ditch, eyes closed, hands clapped over both ears. I snarled at her to stay there, jumped the fence and joined the crowd. Hogan came charging up the driveway on the fenders of a racing ambulance. The crowd split up for him, respectfully. Garcia slapped me on the back and offered his sinister grin. "Just like the good old days at Anzio," he said.

On the floor of the kitchen, three feet from the doorway, Sergeant Matson's corpse lay twisted and contorted in a pool of slowly clotting blood. The clipboard kid's first reckless shots had served their purpose after all.

"Somebody phone the cleanup squad," said Hogan, callously.

I TURNED away, made a ceremony out of lighting up a cigarette, and helped the little woman clear the fence. We passed around the crowd and down the driveway; on the lawn the second ambulance was slewed across the turf and ministering to a frightened bunch of weeping girls in flimsy dressing-gowns. Old Mrs. Doyle, who'd claimed to be their aunt, stared at us haughtily from a police car parked inside the gate.

Hogan caught up with us just as we climbed into the Packard. "Both of you okay?"

"You know us, Dave," I said. "We'd rather see this kind of show than eat."

"Yeah, sure, I know you guys." It was high praise, for him. "Thanks for the hand," he mentioned care-

lessly, and reached in through the offside wing to pet the dog, who growled at him suspiciously. "Was you supposed to get a fee if you'd returned them furs?"

"Why, Dave, of course not," Suzy said. "We make a hobby of this sort of thing."

He yawned at her politely, with his lips together. "Jeez, I'm bushed," he told us. "So all right, you people got to live. So go ahead and pick it up, out of my car. I'd just as leave get rid of it."

Chapter Thirteen



SIXTEEN SYCAMORE TERRACE PRESENTED A front of cool gray brick and primly drawn Venetian blinds. The little woman frowned at me with that funny instinctive concern they all show for early-morning privacy.

"Johnny, she won't be visible for hours..."

The dashboard clock said only 7:20, but the sun was back on duty, trying to make up for yesterday's lost time. I nosed the Packard in against the old live oak, just when a lanky high-school boy in blue jeans on a scooter pattered by and flicked a copy of the *Post-Courier* from saddlebag to lawn.

"There goes your answer, honey bun," I said. "Bad news travels too fast. My clients should get it from me, not from that rag."

"I guess so," she concurred reluctantly. "At least you've done for her what you were hired to do." She held the mink up in her arms and touched a cheek to it. "It is a pretty thing," she told me wistfully.

The Westminster chimps perennated without response. "Maybe you should have phoned her," Suzy said uneasily.

"And get myself brushed off or have to break this story to her on the wire? I don't buy that," I said, and laid my knuckles on the door.

From the sound of her steps down the hall I knew it couldn't be the little colored girl. Miss Leila DeJong didn't bother with the wicket grille or with the chain. She stood before us in a crisp white terry robe and Roman sandals, with her yellow locks brushed smoothly to her shoulders and her lipstick on straight. The wisteria eyes inspected us with something of the same well-bred detachment they would have displayed toward a pair of sideshow freaks. I could not blame her very much; all we required to make ourselves presentable amounted to a bath, a change of clothes, a comb, a razor, and about twelve hours of sleep.

"What is it, please?"

I quickly mumbled the usual conventionalities and introduced the little woman, who succeeded in concealing her embarrassment behind a brightly specious smile.

It was returned, a trifle doubtfully. "How do you do. I am afraid this is an unexpected pleasure... Oh, you've brought my coat! How sweet of you!"

"We felt you'd want to have it back as soon as possible, regardless of the circumstances," Suzy said.

I glanced at her; my long-trained car had caught a tiny note of irony. Our hostess hesitated, bit her lovely lips and frowned. "Oh, do come in," she told us, more or less in resignation, like a girl who has been interviewing servants, all day long.

That contemptuous living-room of hers looked just as big and cold and socially correct; dull iron, polished glass and spotless yellow leather, everything in proper order, nothing disarranged, not so much as a cigarette butt left in an ashtray anywhere. The mantelpiece still bore its tearose spray which appeared to have wilted a little, perhaps because it was only made up of Joanna Hills and working up a slight inferiority complex in there.

Miss Leila DeJong had the mink and was holding it up to the sun streaming in through the patio doors and

striking ice-blue sparks off the cast of the pelts. She inspected the tear in the lining and managed another smile, not too successfully. "It has been damaged, rather, hasn't it?" she mentioned, and her tone was clearly meant to register polite exasperation.

"Just the seam," Miss Suzy, demurely enough to make me pinch myself. "If you like, I'll be glad to sew it up for you."

"There's been a lot of damage done last night," I put in foolishly.

That one went past my charming client like a spitball in the breeze. She draped the mink across the fireside couch and wandered over to the secretary. The scratch of her pen in her checkbook almost hurt my teeth. She did not even ask us to sit down; the idea seemed to be to pay the man and get it over with.

The check read \$250, made out to the order of cash; she hadn't kept my card, and she couldn't be bothered remembering the name of every private dick she hired to go chasing around after her furs. I stepped on the notion I had to tear it up, and thanked her, making something of an effort at civility. Then there was nothing for it but to snap the ball.

"About your fiancé—" I said, and stopped when it occurred to me this was supposed to be her wedding day.

She adjusted the belt of her robe and gave her shapely back a rest against the mantelpiece, beside the tearose spray. On her slender left hand the big solitaire winked at me complacently. "It's quite all right," she told me distantly. "I've reconsidered, and there'll be no further need for you to trouble, really. I'm satisfied Keith is just being difficult. He couldn't possibly have been involved in anything, you know; he's simply not the type."

"He's dead," said Suzy, with that calm disdain of women for each other's feelings, when the chips are down.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Sorry, Miss DeJong," I pitched in hurriedly. "But there it is. He was murdered last night, in a tourist court in Sherman Oaks, by his associates in a rackets setup. The police picked up their trail this morning, cornered them, and shot them down when they put up a fight . . ."

The wisteria eyes were blank with disbelief. "But that's preposterous! It must be someone else, it simply couldn't be— . . . Where did you people learn of this?"

Suzy said: "Where did you think we found your mink?"

OUR hostess sat down on the couch as if her graceful, tawny limbs had suddenly refused their services. She gazed upon the coat and touched a finger to its silky fleece as if she'd never noticed it before and wondered if it might be not quite clean. "Will they ask me to come down, and question me, and make me talk to those reporters?" she inquired.

"Probably not," I said. "It's not the sort of case where the police are likely to go in for much publicity. Of course they're going to find out about you, Miss DeJong, although so far I've managed pretty well to keep you out of it. It's still no crime to fall in love with someone who turns out to be a racketeer."

For the first time she looked at me directly, in a flash of candidness that caught me by surprise. "Of course, I never was in love with Keith," she pointed out to me. "I did not even like him very much." She bit her lips and shrugged. "Why did they kill him, please?"

"It's not a very pleasant story, Miss DeJong," I said. "There was an angle to it of police corruption, and a pretty slick attempt to cover up last Thursday's killing at the Chateau Bayard. There also was another girl involved. If you insist, I'll make a full report to you in writing."

"Please don't bother. You've already gone to so much trouble for me, both of you." She rose and faced us,

steadily enough. "I think I'd better close this house and go away somewhere to brood about my sins."

The little woman said: "Johnny, why don't you tell her what was in the lining of her coat?"

That was the breaking-point, exactly there.

I didn't think so at the time. For a few moments anyway she gave me the idea she only wanted to explain about the tear.

"A little needlework—" I said, and frowned at her.

"There was a tape recording reel concealed in it," the little woman said. "I found it, and Lieutenant Hogan made me take it out. It was about this big." She made a circle with her hands and nodded to me, earnestly. "Why don't you show it to her, darling?" she invited me.

"Because I gave it back to Dave," I said. "For that matter, we'll have to turn over the portable to him as well." Then I remembered Bush reciting Shakespeare on the dummy reel and dug it up out of my raincoat pocket. "This is not the one, you understand. I found it in McElroy's office, but it's just an exercise in speech; we learned that Bush went to dramatic school. It was the first clear proof we had that McElroy was there, last Thursday night, and that he took every record in sight."

MY charming client stared at the bright metal disk. She reached for it and took it from my hands, as if it fascinated her beyond control. "An exercise in speech?"

"As a matter of fact, it's the balcony scene from 'Romeo and Juliet,'" I told her shortly.

"Do you mind?" She drifted over with it to the Capehart in the corner, by the secretary. The Capehart was nice, if your taste ran to lemonwood with carved ebony trimmings, in radio-phonographs. Without television it looked just as big and expensive as Bush's fancy-trick machine. It had the right attachments for magnetic tape, not much of a coincidence to me when I recalled the lady was supposed to be an actress, too.

"I don't believe you're going to enjoy this, Miss DeJong," I said. "The guy is dead, and the production doesn't sound like box office at all."

But the Capehart was humming already, the reel jerking forward through the playback slot and winding itself on an empty spool.

She speaks,

*Oh, speak again, bright angel! for thou art
As glorious to this night—*

This time it struck me Bush seemed to be having sport with it. He was hamming it up even more than might be normally expected for a student of dramatics; his delivery had something odd about it, as if he were cutting himself quite a caper at somebody else's expense. He kept on going, skipping the Juliet lines with no more than a second's pause to catch his breath. When he came to the break where she'd be asking him "*What man art thou, that thus bescreen'd in night, So stumblest on my counsel?*" he was actually chuckling to himself, and his own line "*O wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied?*" rang just about as phony as a wooden nickel.

The reel ran out at last. Miss Leila DeJong removed it off the spindle and stood looking at us with a funny little smile.

"May I borrow this, please? Just for today?"

By then she couldn't have borrowed a match from me for fifteen seconds, but it was Suzy who stepped in between us, took the reel out of her hands and put it back on the machine. "I'd like to play that over, if it's all right with you."

"It needs rewinding, honey doll," I said.

"Why, Johnny? Isn't this just like a typewriter ribbon, with ink on both sides?"

I whistled, not very melodiously, and said: "You may have something there. It wouldn't work on those old-

fashioned wire recorders that I'm used to, but the tape may be reversible at that."

My charming client's smile had grown indulgent, like a mother's when her lovable if possibly somewhat neurotic brood seems just about to set the house on fire. "It is reversible," she told us dulcely, assuring us the place would burn and hadn't been insured.

I pursed my lips at her and snapped the switch.

For a minute the peculiar rhythmic tremolo that emerged from the machine defied my ear, though not because of sound distortion or for any other reason than its sheer implausibility. Then it was broken by the sudden creak of cushioned springs and by another noise, half groan half sigh, distinctly human, unmistakably lascivious. A woman's voice spoke throatily in answer: *Please be still. I've got to talk.*

That made it obvious—the cricket chorus in the background, and the microphone that had been sneaked out from the roadside bushes on a fishing rod.

I'd come across such things before. For shakedown artists, and for private ops who "specialize in marital relations," the procedure has been almost standardized. The guilty couple is discreetly tailed, the bug is introduced somehow, and the result will often bring a pretty piece of change. A vice-squad officer like Bush can pull this stunt on spec, simply by shopping through the night spots on the Sunset Strip for promising material.

There was no question that he'd made a catch that time. Most necking parties in a car don't make good advertising copy, but the few that do will curl your hair. A woman's eloquence, if she takes pleasure in articulated love, is well beyond belief. This particular Juliet wanted to put it in words, a lengthy monologue she did not care to have delayed by interruption.

In that room, on that occasion, under those fantastic circumstances, the effect was nothing short of grim.

I had to switch it off right in the middle to preserve my equanimity. My clever little wife and self-elected helpmate had already turned away and appeared to be closely inspecting her badly damaged manicure. Miss Leila DeJong had retired to the fireplace again and watched us through the smoke screen of another cigarette. The wisteria eyes were almost callously serene.

"That will be one thousand dollars," I said.

Suzy swung around and stared at me. My charming client quirked one corner of those lovely sulky lips into a living question-mark.

"I've earned it," I said. "The reward you put up, if I should find your fiancé and prove him innocent of any crime. Okay, I've found him, and he was."

"I thought you told me that he was a racketeer," she countered brazenly.

"Yes, ma'am. That's how it was supposed to look, as if you didn't know."

"I'm not quite sure I understand."

"Go on with you," I said. "You understand all right. It may not have been your idea, but you were in there pitching, sister. You even went along last night, to rent that cabin at the Montevista and to help your boy-friend stack the deal. I'll bet those sleeping pills were yours, and you'd be just the gal to see about the little secretary's fingerprints marked on the water-glass."

The blonde in the white terry robe still seemed vaguely amused with me. It worried me a bit, because it made no sense. She should have been in tears, or shouting off her head, or even throwing things.

I said: "Let's get this straight, in case you think I'm only guessing, Miss DeJong. On Wednesday afternoon Bush went to see your fiancé, downtown. He took his portable machine and played this hearts-and-flowers stuff of yours, out in the men's room, where the secretary couldn't overhear. He didn't make a sale—he was seen

getting bounced on his ears. But that evening, of course, you were in line to get the same and lost your pretty mink. It was not until Thursday that McElroy realized where Bush's merchandise might have its points. He had already put the coat in storage when it suddenly occurred to him you'd try to get it back.

"With that recording in his hands he figured he could stop you, cold. He mullied it over for a spell and finally called Bush from Santa Monica that night, and made a date with him. But when he got there, Bush was dead, and the apartment had been frisked. Only the portable with just one reel in it was on the bedroom desk, because the killer had not recognized it or because he'd been disturbed. McElroy spotted it, of course—it was the same machine he'd seen the day before. He snapped it up and took it to his office, played the reel, got fooled by Bush as Romeo and dumped the whole contraption in his laundry bin. He didn't dare to call the cops, not with his pinball gambling record and a witness to his fight with Bush, so he decided to lay low; he knew Miss Howe, his secretary, had a crush on him, and when she offered him a temporary hideout at her place on Friday morning, he accepted it. He took the nink back out of storage where it wasn't safe and gave it to her, probably more as a gesture, or because he thought it couldn't be recovered by you quite so easily."

She kept on listening to me with that same patient, almost motherly indulgence, to where I wondered if it was an act or if she really thought she'd get away with it. I said: "The rest of this is easy, when you've got that far along. The killer checked the records he had lifted, probably right here, on that same phonograph of yours. He must've found a lot of interesting blackmail stuff, but not the piece he had been looking for. Which made things awkward all around, because if it turned up it might supply a pretty nasty clue. So the idea was to provide a fall guy, custom-built, and get the cops to close the case, but quick."

"McElroy came in handy there—he had been on the spot, as I would have to testify, and he was playing right into your hands by hiding out. If he committed suicide it would be just as good as a confession. So that meant simply making contact with him through Miss Howe, who thereby signed up as a fellow-victim, and suggesting that the four of you should get together, for some silly reason such as signing a release, or to return his other gifts. He fell for it all right; it never did occur to him you two were dangerous; he only knew that Bush went in for blackmail, and a man like that has lots of enemies. So he obliged you, and you doped his coffee and the girl's, and sneaked them into Cabin 17 through the back alley, and turned on the gas. But both of you were well aware that even clever murderers can make mistakes. That's why you figured out a way that was like coppering your bet, if you'll excuse my pun—you had this record reel which showed Bush was involved with racketeers and with another cop, and which would make a lovely plant, in case something went off the beam. You planted it inside the coat, where it would certainly be found if more than a routine investigation should be made. If not, you'd get it back when either the police or I returned your property. You know, I really like that touch; it shows imagination, and a sense of humor, and the genuine McCoy in cold-blooded depravity."

THAT did the trick, at last. The wisteria eyes were suddenly narrow and livid with rage; the slender hand that bore the winking solitaire lashed out at me to slap my face. I blocked it easily and stepped away from it and said: "Well, lackaday, we have another southpaw in our midst!"

Suzy stopped worrying about her brush-torn nails. "Darling, who did kill Bush?" she asked me interestedly.

"I wasn't there, so I don't know for sure. His voice is probably on that recording, if you care to hear the rest of it. But he should be the guy who told me yesterday that Miss DeJong had quarreled with McElroy about life insurance, Wednesday night. The only guy to whom I mentioned anything about the racketeering angle, and about the other woman who might be involved. The character who went so far as to admit that he had introduced the happy couple and who calmly warned McElroy at the time that he was going to be skinned."

The open French doors to the patio clicked sharply shut. The man who smiled upon us from between the yellow draperies was wearing bright white nylon boxer trunks and nothing else. The trunks were almost but not quite a match for the sheer brilliance of his teeth, and they set off the classic sculpture of his rugged, deeply tanned, big-muscled body to considerable effect.

The smile suggested plain good cheer and warm appreciation for a pair of welcome visitors who had arrived at a perhaps somewhat informal hour. The Scotch-plaid terry towel in his hands invited us to step right up and join him in the pool. It called to mind the wet director-chair I had been worrying about the day before. I gave him a peek at my own set of dental equipment and said: "Good morning, Counselor! We were just chatting about you."

Dr. Jorge M. R. Fernandez, L.L.D., Consultant for Latin-American Affairs, crinkled his mustache for us.

"So I gathered," he told me, and his clipped, incisive Harvard accent sounded pleasantly composed. "Bad form of me to listen in," he added earnestly.

OUTSIDE ON Sycamore, some fifty yards away, the dog struck up a sudden piercing howl.

"Maybe it's just as well you did," I said. "Now you can start to figure how to beat this rap in court, eh, Counselor?"

He shrugged it off, as if we were discussing nothing more vexatious than a parking ticket. "Bush deserved to die," he told me, carelessly theatrical. "Blackmail is bad enough, you will agree, my friend, but when a blackmailer exacts his toll and then attempts to cash in from the other side, he must accept reasonable consequences."

I saw his point, and I saw Bush's too. The hearts-and-flowers record was a one-shot proposition: if the marriage had taken place, on schedule, there was nothing more that could be done with it; you can't divorce a woman for what happened any time before she says "I do."

So Bush would have sold her a copy, for what he considered the traffic would bear, and then he'd simply turned around and offered the original to McElroy. It was good business, if you were doing business that way, and if you had a cop's contemptuous disdain for people getting mad at you.

"How did you spot his cache behind the television screen?" I asked.

Fernandez shrugged again. "His radio was on," he said. "I tried to turn it off and couldn't find the switch. You understand, my friend, one's patience runs a little short on such occasions."

A fit of temper and a lucky kick. . . . I'd had to pull the plug myself, to stop the big machine. "Just one more thing," I said. "Why did you two insist on hiring me to find your pigeon, since you didn't want him found?"

"Ah, but we did," he cheerfully assured me. "Don't you see, my friend, until he phoned me Friday afternoon we'd no idea where he had gone."

"So that was when you made a date to meet him at the coffee shop last night," I said.

"Of course. I told him the police were looking for him, but we'd hired a private man in his behalf who had

already found conclusive evidence that Bush was killed by racketeers."

"Which you were anxious to turn over to him. Very slick," I said. "It almost seems a shame to heave quite such a precious pair of polished, winsome, well-bred, skillful, vicious murderers into the can."

The room fell silent. Khan let out another angry growl and scabbled at the windows of my car. Fernandez brought his educated eyebrows into play. They came way up to here, as if he'd suddenly found cause to disapprove of me and my crude pleasantries.

"You have no power of arrest, my friend," he said. We all looked at each other as if someone had dropped a brick. Our charming hostess lit another cigarette and frowned at us. "You haven't any proof of this, you know," she reminded me casually.

"Surprise," I said. "A confession is proof, if it's made to an officer of the law, who may proceed to take the persons making such confession into custody. It just so happens I was deputized this morning as a temporary county officer, and no one's been around to fire me yet. You two are coming down to Headquarters with me right now."

The little woman gasped and grabbed my arm. Fernandez' fancy Scotch-plaid towel had been flung aside. He was still smiling at us, but not pleasantly—a calculating smile with brains behind it, thinking fast, thinking of holes to be dug in the garden, and a bloodstained carpet to be burned in the incinerator, and a chunk of hamburger with strychnine for the dog.

The hunting knife that had been hidden in the towel looked a full ten inches long, and sharp enough to slice a roast.

"You should have left that with McElroy's body, Counselor," I said.

He glanced at it, and took a step in my direction, walking on the balls of his bare feet. "I almost did," he said. "Then I remembered I might need it still." His smile had lapsed into a grimace and I cursed myself for having put my gun back in the glove compartment of my car. "I don't like guns," Fernandez said as if he'd read my mind. "They have a greasy smell, they make a noise, they soil your hands." He took another cat-like step.

I pushed the little woman off my arm. "Go find a phone somewhere around here, cherry pie—while I take care of Gorgeous George."

"The phone can wait," she said, and slipped behind the couch.

The blonde in the white terry robe still leaned against the mantelpiece. "It was the attitude of one who'd seen the show before, but the wisteria eyes were wide again, and wantonly aroused. "He locked the doors, on you, you know," she told us graciously. "While you were listening to me on the phonograph. . ."

It was the kind of spot where it occurs to you you could make money renting out your stomach, for a deep-freeze locker. I wasn't scared, exactly, but I'd had my share of troubles for the week, and here was still another lad who itched to have a go at me. I couldn't use that, and I couldn't use his nasty girl-friend looking on and waiting for him to carve his initials in my jugular. There was no point in making an attempt to talk him out of it. A man's who's made three corpses in two days and who has indirectly caused another three is like a hopeless alcoholic—all he wants is two more drinks.

I picked up the coffee table with the plate-glass top. It was a good deal heavier than I had counted on. I'd meant to crown him with it, but it carried so much ornamental iron that I barely managed lifting it in time to meet his sudden rush. He saw it coming up in front of him and swerved away from it, straight-arming at it like a halfback going through left tackle. The shock of

contact jarred my spine and knocked the glass into a hundred fragments on the rug. I threw the framework after him and missed him by an inch; it clanged against the wall as if a bulldozer had rammed the house.

That was all right. He hadn't touched me yet, and there were yards of broken glass between us now which didn't bother me a bit, but which were apt to prove a trifle inconvenient under his naked feet. I needed the advantage, too—a knife in the hands of a trained athlete is not a very comfortable proposition, even if you have the benefit of Army research in such matters. You can't get at the guy, for if you try he'll simply keep on whittling you to ribbons; all you can afford is wait for him to come to you and hope he gets a little out of line.

"What's holding up progress, Counselor?" I jeered at him. "Alraid you'll get your tootsies hurt?"

He didn't snarl or anything. His flying leap had cleared the glass and put him almost in my lap. The knife milled through a flashing arc that started at his ankles and achieved its apex just about a cigarette-length from my chin. I slapped a grip on the wrist and the biceps behind it and battered my shoulder inside, but his skin was slippery with sweat, and his free arm looped round my neck before I got him airborne—both of us had to let go: he fishtailed clear over my head and hit the rug, not nearly hard enough, recovering himself before my place-kick reached his jaw.

This time we were both breathing just a little fast for comfort. Outside the dog was tearing up my car and making like a wolfpack in a trap. Behind the couch Suzy had pounced upon the mink.

"Go get him, Johnny!" she cried—and tossed it to me. I caught it easily and almost laughed out loud. A nice big hunk of fur is just the thing to cramp your old stiletto; back in ancient Rome they did it with a net. I pushed a chair out of my way and shuffled forward on the rug, closing in on Fernandez and waving the mink.

Behind me, Miss Leila DeJong cried out, a cry of warning and acute despair. I heard a sound of scuffling and just then Fernandez charged me like a bull. It was too easy, in a way. The coat absorbed the shock, the knife slashed through it, and the arm behind the knife got sheathed in endless folds of softly clinging, mildly perfumed, gaudy-hued Aleutian blue, \$20,000 worth of it.

My fist crashed meatily into his Adam's apple, and my heel had hooked him off his feet. He went down like a sack of potatoes, not out cold but with no wind left in his lungs. I grinned at him, and reached over for the knife.

"Johnny, look out!"

There was water all over my head and there were roses on the rug beside me, pretty, salmon-pink Joanna Hills, and only slightly wilted. There were stars before me, golden rockets, scarlet candlebombs and fiery serpent wheels. The heavy iron vase that had been on the mantelpiece hooked in my collar, hung there for a while and vanished with a sudden clunk. The floor came up to meet me at an idiotic angle, hit me in the face and rolled me over on my back.

Fernandez' eyes looked into mine. They were no more than just an inch or two away, huge pools of coffee-liquid brown, dully expressionless, the whites shot through with blood. The mink moved slowly over to envelop me; the sun went off behind a cloud. Its fading rays flashed off the knife as it approached my neck.

DETECTIVE LIEUTENANT DAVID HOGAN sneered at me politely from the easy chair beside my bed. I knew he was being polite, because he had removed his hat, since there were ladies present.

"You should of seen them X-ray pictures," he admonished me. "The doc says he ain't never seen the likes of it. I could of told him long ago you got a skull that's solid bone. Boy, don't you ever learn?"

I scowled at him and touched the hefty strip of plaster under my right ear, but gingerly. "Quit razzing me, you lousy Mick, and tell me how you happened to cut in."

"Police routine, Johnny." He hadn't had such fun with me in years. "Can't beat it—nobody can. We checked the heel prints on those guys back at Columbus Park, the minute you was gone. We got no make on them, not with this Seal Test that was on the napkin."

"Oh, fine," I said. "A little thing I overlooked, and right away you have to take advantage. But it doesn't show how you caught up with me."

"That so? You think we'd let you take away the coat for free? The sergeant here was right behind you in that crummy heap of mine. We didn't like the shuffle on this deal, is how it was."

Garcia winked at me. He leaned against the doorpost where he had been studying the nurses' legs as they passed down the corridor. "A broken fuel pump," he said. "On Wilshire, just as you turned north at Crescent Drive. I phoned the boss, and we put out a reader after you. Then as we cruised around we caught the Beverly dispatcher on this 204."

"The old lady next door!" I said reverently.

"Yeah, sure," said Hogan, still sneering. "She phoned in a beef, on that big dog of yours barking off his head. So we shayed right over with them college boys from Beverly, and there you was, laid out among the lilies, with the guy all set to give you a real close shave, and your wife pulling hairs with a nekkid blonde already. Boy, what you missed!"

SUZY smiled for me, bewitchingly. She tucked the sheets around my shoulders and deposited a small cool hand upon my aching brow. "He's only kidding, darling," she assured me solemnly. "That awful woman grabbed a flower vase, and I grabbed her, only I got her robe instead. Her figure isn't very good . . ."

"Suppose you tell me how you knew she was involved," I growled at her.

"I tried to long before, but none of you would listen," she explained. "I didn't like the clumsy way that lining had been stitched. It wasn't man-clumsy, just woman-clumsy, and a working girl such as that poor Miss Howe would have had more experience, you see."

Garcia snickered. Hogan stared at her derisively. I merely groaned and touched the bandage on my head. She looked at all of us as if we should appreciate her more and asked me: "Johnny, who had organized that nasty racket, if it wasn't McElroy after all?"

"I guess Dave knows the answer and doesn't want to publish it," I said. "It was probably Matson himself. From Bush's point of view, there wouldn't be much point in getting anybody but the chief on record, when you come to think of it. He must have told his partner that he'd done it as a kind of life insurance, but when he was dead you can imagine Matson figured I had taken it. Then when he saw me in Columbus Park he tried to blast me, feeling sure I'd framed him for the killing."

Hogan said: "You got no faith in cops, could be what's wrong with you."

I pursed my lips at him, and Frank Brownell, the district manager of Mutual Indemnity, came striding in. "You," he said. "Again."

"Yeah, me," I told him. "What about it? Who's the guy who got me into this?"

He offered me a snort and crooked a finger at the little woman; much to my surprise she meekly rose and followed him into the corridor. When she came back she looked at me reproachfully. "Darling, those lovely grapes are his. He just feels guilty, don't you realize?"

The check she showed me was for three months' salary. I sighed at it and said: "It ought to do, for a down payment on your rosewood grand."

WHO'S WHO IN THIS ISSUE



James M. Fox

AUTHOR of "The Aleutian Blue Mink Coat," which will be published by Little, Brown & Company on June 7, 1951, under the title of "The Aleutian Blue Mink."

James M. Fox, born in Rotterdam, Holland, was educated in the Universities of Leyden, Oxford, Berlin and Utrecht. He practiced law at the Hague and Batavia before coming to New York City, where he also practiced law for a short time. He has been around the world three times, speaks six languages, was once arrested as a spy in Japan (judged not guilty). He has had special newspaper assignments for the New York *Times* and Dallas *News*. He served with the Netherlands Ministry of War in London in exile, and married a Texas girl before settling in Los Angeles. Now a United States citizen, Mr. Fox has abandoned law and devotes himself to writing. Other detective novels by Mr. Fox are: "The Lady Regrets," "Death Commits Bigamy," "The Inconvenient Bride," "The Gentle Hangman," "The Wheel Is Fixed."

John F. Wallace

JOHAN F. WALLACE, (see "Shakedown in Convoy," beginning on page 81), was brought up in the region about the Bay of Fundy and was educated as an engineer in Toronto. He served as a junior and then chief engineer on merchant ships, and continued in this capacity during the war after he had been turned down by the Navy and the Air Force because of faulty eyesight. His wartime career was none the less adventurous because of that, however; for twice his ship was sunk under him, with the result that he had to be hospitalized afterward. In 1944 he joined the United States Transport Service as chief engineer, and was stationed in London during the final V-bomb blitz. He was honorably discharged in 1945. Mr. Wallace is thirty-six years old, and is married.

Donald Culross Peattie

HE was brought up in the tradition of authorship, for his father, Robert Peattie, was an able newspaper man, and his mother, Elia Peattie, was herself a well-known writer—as is his wife Louise Redfield Peattie.

Born in Chicago in 1908, he attended Harvard, was graduated *cum laude* in 1931, and set out to be a botanist with the Department of Agriculture. He was given a John Guggenheim fellowship in 1936, and is a member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters. Among his well-known books are "Vence, the Story of a Provençal Town," "The Bright Lexicon," "An Almanac for Moderns," "Singing in the Wilderness," and "American Heartwood." For some years now, he has been a roving editor for *Reader's Digest*.

MacArthur Carman

I AM 29 years old and was graduated from the U. S. Military Academy at West Point in 1941. During the war I served in the Armored Force, the Parachute Infantry, and in O.S.S. In this last organization, I participated in the Jedburg Operation, dropped near Besançon, France, and worked with the F.F.I. behind the lines.

That was in 1944; and in 1945 I was sent to China, where I was commander of a four-man team named Grizzly, with the mission of interdicting the Japanese line of communications along a seventy-mile stretch of the Peiping-Hankow Railroad just north of Hankow. Captain McIntosh of Team Hyena had the sector north of mine, and Major Paul Cyr the next sector, which included the Yellow River Bridge. You may have seen an article he wrote for the *Saturday Evening Post* a few years ago called, "I Blew the Yellow River Bridge," or some such title.

Grizzly was flown in to Liuhang from Sian with arms and ammunition to outfit a Commando battalion, plus a reserve of Chinese ammunition to be used in the control of two guerrilla columns of a thousand men each. Liuhang was the headquarters of the Tenth War Area, under Marshal Li Ping Hsien, and this area was a "pocket" located in the triangle formed by the Ping-Han line and the Yellow and Yangtse Rivers; an area so poor and primitive that it had been left unoccupied by the Japanese in the tacit understanding that the railroad would not be too much disturbed.

The arrival of Teams Grizzly and Hyena was therefore embarrassing to the local Chinese. Our only real au-

thority, or face, lay in our keeping physical control of the arms we brought; and these the Chinese desired for the same reason. The crisis came at the point when we had finished our training and were ready to execute our first raid—and it was during that week that the first atom bomb was dropped. I am glad for all of our sakes that it ended when it did, but I have always wondered how it would have turned out. . . .

Although Hirohito proclaimed his surrender, a number of Japanese units in the vicinity felt that since they had never themselves been defeated in battle, it would be dishonorable to give up. Team Grizzly was ordered to join General Jung, commanding the Seventh Army which faced the solution of one of these problems at Pengpu.

The element that made General Jung's problem so peculiar was that the Japanese in Pengpu were hesied by the Communists, who were in turn besieged by the Seventh Army, making three rings of mutually hostile troops around the city.

General Jung's action was to load his staff onto a flotilla of old steam launches and run the Communist gantlet down the Yellow River straight into the heart of the Japanese garrison—where he negotiated with them for their surrender while at the same time directing the operations of his army against the Communists outside. He was completely successful, but it took a long time.

So much for my China background. After the war, I worked for some time in the Information Section of Army Ground Forces, doing research and developing material for the Armed Forces series of radio broadcasts, and was honorably discharged in April, 1948.



MacArthur Carman

BLUE BOOK

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